

Clause 1 -
Short title

Ms LOVELL - I wanted to update members and put on record the approach the Labor members will be taking today with this debate. Tasmanians deserve to be able to trust that politicians are making decisions in the best interests of the community. But as long as Tasmania has no laws governing political donations - which is where we are currently at - Tasmanians will rightly question who their representatives are really serving. That is why Labor has been fighting for the introduction of a strong framework to govern Tasmania's political donation laws for more than five years. We introduced a private member's bill in parliament; progressed several debates about the issue in parliament; worked with the community to build support for greater transparency in politics; and held the Government to account through the media, parliament and budget Estimates. It is why we believe it would be unacceptable for yet another state election to be held without any donation laws being in place at all.

The Liberal Party has opposed and delayed progress for more than five years. Their party is bitterly divided on this important issue and they are under enormous pressure from their own party administration to drop the issue completely.

The reforms that have finally come up for debate for today do not go far enough, but we believe they go as far as we can expect as long as the Liberals are in charge. We know Tasmania needs a truly level playing field in politics. Labor wants to see the threshold for the disclosure of donations reduced to \$1000. We want spending caps on how much candidates and political parties can spend. We want real time disclosure of donations, and we believe there is a need to close loopholes that could allow third parties to get around disclosure limits. Without those changes we will never see the truly level playing field that Tasmanian politics needs. We are absolutely committed to these policies. And more than that, we know that these are just a handful of the extra changes that are required to Tasmania's electoral laws to truly fix our broken system, promote democracy, and restore faith and trust in politics.

We also know the Liberals and the ex-Liberal Independents who still have a majority in the House of Assembly remain firmly opposed to these important measures. We have it on very good authority that there is very little appetite remaining in the Liberal Government to progress any reform at all. It has been evident from the absolute lack of progress of the bill in this place, until there was literally no other business for us to deal with. This bill was tabled in the other place in May last year and in this place on 24 November last year. We have had a staggered, piecemeal approach to the second reading stage and we are only here today because we have no other legislation before us.

We have even heard that the Government is, in many ways, hoping the bill will be so heavily amended in this place that it gives them cover to abandon the reforms altogether. We are also realistic. There is a very real risk here that with any amendment at all, even the minimal reforms in this bill are likely to be lost altogether. We understand any amendments to the current bill are extremely unlikely to pass the House of Assembly, and will only lead to the bill stalling and yet another election with no disclosure regime. It is important that people understand the process here.

I know there is a view that what happens with this bill is solely up to this Chamber, but we know that is not true. Any amendment supported in this place must also be supported in the other place; and it is the Government that would be in control of the progress, or lack of progress, of this bill and any amendments. We do not want to see these reforms fail altogether, so for this reason we will not be moving the amendments we have previously flagged and we will not be supporting any amendments today.

We believe any amendments will be used by the Government to stall progress on the bill and stop any reform from occurring at all. However, we will be introducing a private member's bill at the earliest opportunity, to progress our amendments without holding the entire bill to ransom. This will also provide an opportunity for other members' amendments to be fully debated and considered by the parliament without putting the entire package of reforms at risk. We do not want to give the Government any excuse at all not to progress these reforms at the absolute earliest opportunity. I know many will be deeply disappointed with this decision, but I hope members and others can understand the decision we have taken, if not accept it; and can see that we remain committed to further reform and will create an opportunity as soon as we can for us to debate measures to take the reforms even further.

Ms ARMITAGE - Madam Deputy Chair, I am also very disappointed with this bill and I make no secret of the fact that I have amendments. There are many aspects I have not agreed with and I think we can see it is a terrible bill, which is evidenced by the number of amendments that are before us.

I agree with the member for Elwick that the \$5000 threshold is far too high and \$1000 is certainly more palatable. I also believe there should be a cap on spending. I supported the bill into second reading because I believe it is really important to at least allow amendments to try to make it a better bill, if we can. That is important.

I spoke to Dr Kevin Bonham after we received his email today and asked if he was okay for me to read his email. I will not read all of it to put his email into *Hansard* today -

Ms Rattray - I think you should read the lot.

Ms ARMITAGE - I could read the lot. As I said, Kevin did not have a problem with my reading it:

Dear members of the Legislative Council,

I am just writing concerning the Electoral Disclosure and Funding Bill 2022 (No. 25), sections 132 to 133 - public funding model with payment by candidate - as I believe amendments may be debated in the near future.

I understand my concerns with this section were covered by Tania Rattray yesterday. It may have been raised by others and also that Labor has prepared an amendment on the matter, for which my thanks.

I just want to be very sure all MLCs are familiar with my concerns and reasoning about the proposal to pay public funding by candidate rather than per party as in the ACT.