HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ELECTORAL AND REFERENDUM AMENDMENT (ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AND OTHER MEASURES) BILL 2005

Second Reading

SPEECH

Wednesday, 29 March 2006

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Mr GRIFFIN (Bruce) (6.57 pm)—The Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Electoral Integrity and Other Measures) Bill 2005 represents one of the most outrageous attacks on Australian democracy since 1901. While we are supportive of some of the minor clauses of this bill, its most substantial sections make it completely unacceptable. I therefore move:

That all words after “That” be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

“this bill be withdrawn until undemocratic provisions that:

(1) reduce the period of time Australians have to enrol to vote and update their details on the electoral roll;

(2) introduce new proof of identity requirements;

(3) increase the disclosure thresholds to $10,000; and

(4) increase the tax-deductibility of political donations are removed”.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BK Bishop)—Is the amendment seconded?

Mr Sercombe—I second the amendment.

Mr GRIFFIN—This bill will essentially make it far harder to vote but much easier to secretly donate to political parties. Labor is opposed to provisions in this bill which will see the electoral roll close early, introduce new proof of identity requirements, increase the various disclosure thresholds to $10,000 and increase the size and scope of the tax deductibility regime for political donations. Labor believes that the Australian electoral system should enfranchise as many eligible Australian voters as possible and be as transparent as possible. Substantial sections of this legislation are in complete contradiction to these goals.

The government has been unable to find any credible witnesses or experts to support the proposed changes I have just outlined. This is probably not that surprising, given that the only real reason for this bill is that the coalition government believe it will give them some sort of partisan political advantage at future elections. This bill is yet another example of an irresponsible, out of touch and arrogant coalition government abusing their control of the Senate to pass laws that benefit their interests and objectives while disadvantaging thousands of ordinary Australians.

Of the changes outlined above, three will make it far harder for Australians to participate in federal elections. These changes include reducing the time which citizens have to enrol to vote or to update their details on the electoral roll, introducing new proof of identity requirements for those enrolling to vote or updating their details on the roll and introducing new proof of identity requirements for those lodging a provisional vote.

Let me begin by rejecting outright the government’s justification for these provisions. In his speech to the Sydney Institute on 4 October last, the then Special Minister of State, Eric Abetz, claimed that these changes were designed to ensure the integrity of the electoral roll. This claim is rubbish, given that there is little to no evidence of electoral fraud in Australia. Even Senator Abetz in his speech agreed that there is ‘little evidence of fraud in our electoral roll’. But do not take his word for it. During the Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee’s inquiry into this bill, Professor Brian Costar, a noted expert on electoral matters, stated:

I think that this conspiracy theory ... that there is out there a vast army of villains who want to take advantage of every nook and cranny of the law to sign up phantom voters ... to rort the system is not based on evidence.

The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters conducted a thorough investigation into the integrity of the electoral roll in 2001. During that inquiry, the AEC testified that it had compiled a list of all possible cases of
enrolment fraud for the decade 1990 to 2001, a list which included 71 cases in total or about one per 200,000 enrolments. Between 1990 and 2001 there were five federal elections and a referendum. At each of these about 12 million people voted, a total of about 72 million votes. The 71 known cases of false enrolment amounted to less than one vote per million being cast by a person who had knowingly enrolled at a false address. Importantly, at this time, the AEC also noted that these false enrolments were not deliberate attempts to corrupt or unduly influence electoral results.

The true motivation behind these changes is to try to secure the coalition government an electoral advantage. Both the current Special Minister of State, Gary Nairn, and the former minister, Senator Eric Abetz, quote comments made by former Labor minister Graham Richardson in relation to 1984 amendments to the Electoral Act to justify altering the electoral system to gain a political advantage. These comments only highlight the fact that this is a politically motivated campaign by the government. What both the minister and Senator Abetz failed to note is that in 1984 Labor sought to enfranchise the 90,000 voters who missed out on the opportunity to vote because of the early closure of the rolls in the 1983 federal election. Their changes, on the other hand, have the potential to disenfranchise thousands of Australian voters. I completely reject the argument of Senator Abetz and the minister; it is completely unacceptable to amend the electoral system and in the process disenfranchise thousands of Australians to gain a political advantage.

The first set of regressive changes embodied in this bill that I wish to address relates to the proposed early closure of the electoral roll. The government plans to close the roll at 8 pm on the day that an election writ is issued, except in two special cases: where a person will attain 18 years of age between the day the writ is issued and polling day or where a person will be granted Australian citizenship between the day on which the election writ is issued and polling day. In these instances, enrollees will have three days in which to enrol. People wishing to change their details on the electoral roll will also be given only three days to do so.

Current legislation allows for a seven-day period of grace after an election writ is issued for people to enrol to vote and update their existing details on the electoral roll. The government justifies these changes by contending that the AEC does not have time to adequately process the details of people enrolling to vote or updating their details in the period between the issue of the writ and polling day, hence leading to more errors on the electoral roll.

The AEC has not said that this is the case. The AEC has said that the current seven-day arrangement does not prevent it from taking adequate steps to prevent fraudulent enrolment—in fact, quite the contrary. In relation to proposals to close the rolls early, the AEC, in a year 2000 submission to an inquiry into the integrity of the electoral roll, stated:

... the AEC expects the rolls to be less accurate because there will be less time for existing electors to correct their enrolments and for new enrolments to be received.

According to figures provided by the AEC, at the 2004 election over 280,000 people enrolled to vote or changed their enrolment in a substantive way in the seven days between the issuing of the writs and the close of the roll. This figure includes approximately 78,000 new enrollees, 78,000 people changing or updating their existing details, 96,000 people transferring intrastate and 30,000 people transferring interstate. So, under this government’s proposed changes, the ability of over 280,000 Australians to vote, going on the figures from the 2004 election, could be jeopardised.

History also tells us that closing the rolls on the day that an election writ is issued will see tens of thousands of Australians excluded from voting. In 1983 the electoral roll was closed on the day that the election writ was issued. As I alluded to earlier, on polling day approximately 90,000 people found themselves unable to vote because they had not enrolled in time. An AEC official who recalled the 1993 election said:

It created a lot of confusion and a lot of provisional votes, and a lot of people go in to vote, find they are not on the roll and just walk out.

The people most affected by these regressive provisions will be those in our community who already face the greatest disadvantage and the most difficulty accessing our country’s decision makers. There is a wide consensus amongst experts in this area that closing the rolls early will have the greatest impact upon those who do not have a complete understanding of our political system.

In the JSCEM inquiry into the 2004 election, leading electoral commentator Antony Green asserted:
If suddenly the election is called two or three months early, people will not have regularised their enrolment. You will cut young people off, as the numbers show ...

It has been clearly established in a report by the AEC, titled *Youth electoral study*, that young people are disengaged from the electoral process. A key point of the report is that, generally, ‘young people do not understand the voting system’. In addition, the report asserts that young people ‘do not perceive themselves, generally, as well prepared to participate in voting’. Given the lack of understanding and preparedness of young people, closing the electoral roll early will serve only to ensure that even fewer of them are enrolled to vote and hence able to vote in federal elections. In his submission to the JSCEM inquiry into the 2004 election, Professor Costar emphasised:

Good reasons would need to be adduced to justify the denial of the vote to such a large cohort of citizens; especially the new enrolees, most of whom would be young people, who need encouragement to become civically engaged.

No good reason to disenfranchise thousands of young Australians has been produced by the government.

At the last federal election almost 1.7 million people between the ages of 18 and 25 enrolled to vote for the first time. This bill will exclude a significant proportion of these young Australians from lodging a vote, stripping them of their democratic right to participate in a federal election. This has serious implications not only for the next election but also for future elections. How can we expect young people to develop respect for parliamentary processes when the government works so hard to exclude them at the first available opportunity?

Australians from non-English-speaking backgrounds will also lose out as a result of this bill. In a submission to the JSCEM inquiry into the 2004 election the Public Interest Advocacy Centre pointed out that this group is disproportionately represented in the group of citizens who register to vote in the period of seven days after the issue of the writ. This is hardly surprising given that many Australians from non-English-speaking backgrounds may not be familiar with the Australian electoral system or have the language skills to properly understand information with regard to their electoral obligations. While the government has provided increased funds to the AEC for various purposes, including advertising, an advertising campaign cannot offset the number of people who would have enrolled to vote in the additional seven days after the issue of the writ.

During the Senate legislation committee inquiry into this bill, Professor Costar and former Electoral Commissioner Professor Colin Hughes were keen to assert that no amount of publicity could make up for the current seven-day period of grace. Professor Costar stated:

Let us remember that, at that period, lots of other noise is going to crowd out an election advertising campaign. Who is interested?

Ironically, the government majority report from the JSCEM inquiry into the 2004 federal election provides compelling evidence supporting this conclusion in terms of advertising campaigns directed specifically at Australians from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Paragraph 54 of chapter 6 states:

The Committee recognises the efforts of the AEC to target electorates with high percentages of constituents from non-English speaking backgrounds. However, it is evident that, by and large, the programs such as those in the ethnic media and the election information sessions did not have a significant effect on informal voting figures.

If advertising campaigns to raise awareness of voting procedures amongst these constituents have been unsuccessful, there is no reason to think that attempts to inform this group about changes to enrolment time lines are likely to be any more successful.

The changes proposed by this bill also threaten to increase unnecessarily the administrative pressure on the AEC. According to former Electoral Commissioner Professor Hughes, the AEC staff working in polling places on election day will be placed under increased pressure. During the Senate legislation committee inquiry into this bill, Professor Hughes asserted:

What you are looking at is a large number of concerned people turning up at the polling place and trying to get their affairs sorted out. This will produce a great deal of congestion.

When asked about the effect of these changes, Professor Hughes stated:

I think the answer, if you want it summarised in a word, is shambles. I think it would produce shambles at a large number of polling places …
This government’s assertion that people will not be disenfranchised as a result of closing the roll early only demonstrates how out of touch it is with respect to the lives of ordinary Australians. Unfortunately, people are leading increasingly busy and hectic lives and, while enrolling to vote may be an important activity, it is unlikely to be at the forefront of people’s minds. Labor understands these realities and will continue to oppose unnecessary government changes that only increase pressure on all Australians.

The second set of changes contained within this bill that threaten to disenfranchise thousands of Australians relates to new and unnecessary proof of identity requirements for new enrollees and those updating their details. Once again, these changes are based on the government’s spurious claim that these changes are necessary to ensure the integrity of the electoral roll—a claim that, as demonstrated earlier, is purely fictional. Provisions set out in the bill require that someone enrolling to vote or updating their details must provide one or more of the following types of identification: a drivers licence; a prescribed identity document to be shown to a person who is in a prescribed class of electors and who can attest to the identity of the person; or an application for enrolment signed by two referees who are not related to the applicant, whom they have known for at least one month and who can provide a drivers licence number. Once again, young Australians will be severely disadvantaged as a result of these changes. In New South Wales alone, approximately 104,000 people aged between 16 and 19 did not have a drivers licence in 2004—a figure equating to approximately 30 per cent of young New South Wales citizens. The proposed provisions in this bill will make enrolling to vote a far more difficult and burdensome exercise for a large proportion of these young Australians.

The minority report from the JSCEM inquiry into the 2004 election points out that, in all the states and territories, between 10 per cent and 20 per cent of adults do not have a drivers licence. In his speech to the Sydney Institute, Senator Abetz claimed:

I am attracted to the view that production of identification is not burdensome …

The figures provided above make a mockery of this statement and confirm that a large proportion of the Australian population will find it more difficult to enrol to vote or update their details on the electoral roll as a result of these changes. These claims once again demonstrate how out of touch this government is, as all the statistics point to the fact that significant numbers of people will be affected.

The ability of homeless Australians to lodge a vote in a federal election will also be compromised by the introduction of the proof of identity requirements proposed in this bill. The 2001 census, which provides the most up-to-date figures on homelessness in Australia, revealed that there were approximately 100,000 homeless Australians. These people already are hugely disadvantaged in general terms; they now will be disadvantaged in their ability to enrol to vote. The changes proposed by this bill with respect to new proof of identity provisions will make it even harder for them to exercise their democratic rights.

The government’s bill will require that someone enrolling as an ‘itinerant voter’ must meet the proof of identity provisions outlined above. This is a completely unrealistic requirement to impose upon these people. How many homeless people do the government believe have a drivers licence or access to the types of documents that this bill will require? Numerous studies conducted by interest groups and the AEC point to the fact that homeless Australians already find it difficult to participate in the electoral process. These changes will do nothing more than deter 100,000 of Australia’s most disadvantaged citizens from enrolling to vote.

This legislation also introduces a new, and unnecessary, proof of identity regime for those required to lodge a provisional vote in a federal election. Under the proposed changes, an elector will have to show an official their drivers licence or another form of prescribed identity document at the time of casting a provisional vote. If they do not have the appropriate identification with them, they must provide the information to the AEC by the close of business on the Friday following polling day. According to figures provided by the AEC from the 2001 federal election, over 100,000 people lodged a provisional vote. The AEC points out that, as a proportion of the total vote, this number did not change between the 2001 election and the 2004 election. Had the government’s new laws been in place in 2001, over 100,000 Australians would have been adversely affected or deterred from voting. In the 2004 election, the same proportion of Australian voters would have been adversely affected by these changes.

The early closure of the electoral roll could see even more provisional votes cast because more people will not have had the chance to regularise their enrolment. This could see these figures escalate and even more pressure being exerted on the AEC. In a briefing I received from the Department of Finance and Administration and the AEC on this bill, AEC officials admitted that they could not give an estimate of how many people would be likely to have the appropriate identification with them on polling day. These people will be required to present
the appropriate identification to the AEC by the Friday following polling day for their vote to be included in the count. One can only imagine the extra work this scenario will create for the AEC between polling day and the Friday following polling day. Under the proposed scheme, the AEC will have an increased administrative burden on polling day and any number of cases to administer by the Friday following polling day.

Another important point is that a provisional voter who does not have the required information on polling day must have the documents required to verify their identity to the AEC by the Friday following polling day—not sent by the Friday. This requirement will severely disadvantage those in regional and rural areas who are not within reasonable proximity of an AEC office, who do not have access to a fax machine or the internet and who are located where postage services are not as frequent. Given their attempt to assert their independent role within the coalition, the National Party should be outraged by this requirement and should stand against their senior coalition partners on this issue. When the provisional votes lodged in Australia’s five biggest regional divisions—which include Grey in South Australia, Kalgoorlie in Western Australia, Lingiari in the Northern Territory, Maranoa in Queensland and Parkes in New South Wales—are tallied, we can see that over 3,000 provisional votes were lodged in the 2004 election. These individuals from rural and regional Australia may struggle to ensure that their identification details reach the AEC by the Friday cut-off date.

On top of the government’s incompetent handling of the AWB affair, this is just another slap in the face for regional and rural Australians. Mind you, it probably is not surprising that the government would want to disenfranchise wheat farmers after recent events. Labor believes that, given the complete lack of evidence of electoral fraud, there is no justification to amend the existing laws in relation to enrolment time lines or to introduce new proof of identity regimes. These changes will only make it harder for Australians to enrol and to vote in a federal election, arrogantly stripping people of their right to participate in our democracy and, importantly, disenfranchising those in our community who are already the most marginalised.

One final area I would like to touch on regarding the government’s attempt to disenfranchise thousands of Australians is prisoner voting. This issue was raised by Senator Abetz in his speech to the Sydney Institute. Senator Abetz asserted that, once a person had committed an offence which resulted in full-time detention, he or she should not be able to participate in the democratic process. This bill amends the existing legislation so that, although prisoners serving a term of full-time detention of three years or less may stay on the electoral roll, they will not be permitted to vote.

Labor does not support this amendment. We believe the current arrangement whereby prisoners serving a full-time sentence of three years or less retain the right to vote in federal elections is adequate, for the simple reason that, as these people may well re-enter society during a government’s term, they should have their democratic say in who will be in government at that time. We believe this a logical approach and a far better one than the one proposed by the government.

While this bill will disenfranchise thousands of Australians for no good reason, it also proposes to make it easier to secretly donate funds to political parties. The government’s bill will introduce large increases in the disclosure threshold for political donations and increase the level and scope of tax-deductible contributions to political parties. These changes will dramatically reduce the transparency of Australia’s electoral system and represent nothing more than a greedy grab for cash by the coalition government.

Labor is strongly opposed to the provisions in this bill that increase all the various disclosure thresholds to above $10,000 and index this amount to inflation. Of particular concern are changes which increase the disclosure threshold for donors and political parties from $1,500 to above $10,000 and increase the threshold at which political parties can receive anonymous donations from $1,000 to above $10,000. The current threshold of $1,500 is a good benchmark which does not place overly burdensome administrative obligations on political parties and donors. It ensures that the Australian public have access to information on who provides substantial funds to political parties. This information is vital to ensuring that voters can hold governments and political parties accountable.

Both former Special Minister of State, Senator Eric Abetz, and Brian Loughnane, the Federal Director of the Liberal Party, have claimed that, if the threshold level were raised to $10,000, based on the 2003-04 AEC figures, 88 per cent of the total dollar value of all donations received by the major parties would still be publicly declared. This statement amounts to some very selective accounting by Mr Loughnane and Senator Abetz. Both fail to acknowledge that this 88 per cent is arrived at by only including ‘donations’ in their analysis. What they fail to do is include amounts received by way of other receipts, subscriptions and other unspecified payments.
In short, this means that the 88 per cent referred to by these two senior Liberal Party figures only refers to approximately 36 per cent or about $21 million of the nearly $82 million received by the major parties in private contributions for 2003-04. When applied to the full list of 2003-04 figures, the sources of only 57 per cent or $47 million of the $82 million received by the major parties in private funding would have been revealed. This is down from the 72 per cent or $59 million that was revealed under the $1,500 threshold. When the proposed threshold is applied to the 2004-05 figures, the results show that the sources of only 58 per cent or $60 million of the $103 million received by the major parties in private funding would have been revealed. This is down from 75 per cent or $78 million under the existing $1,500 regime.

Both Senator Abetz and Mr Loughnane also miss the point on disclosure. They are only talking about the proportion of the total monetary value of donations to be disclosed under the proposed regime, rather than the total number of receipts that will be removed from public scrutiny as a result of these changes. Labor believes that, for the electoral system to be transparent, the public need to see who has contributed to a party’s funding and not just those who donated the largest amounts. The current $1,500 threshold helps ensure this level of transparency. The AEC’s release of the annual disclosure returns for 2004-05 revealed that the major political parties received over $143 million in funding. Eighty per cent of the receipts listed by the major parties were $10,000 or less; so, had the government’s planned changes been in place in 2004-05, 80 per cent of the receipts for the $143 million may not have been exposed to public scrutiny. Put simply, the cumulative effect of the increase in disclosure thresholds could see tens of millions of dollars received by political parties disappearing from public view.

Another point worth noting is that disclosure thresholds apply separately to each registered political party. In the context where the national, state and territory branches of the major political parties are each treated as a registered political party, this means that a major party constituted by the nine branches has the cumulative benefit of nine thresholds. The increase to $10,000 will mean that a donor can give a total of up to $80,000 to the Liberal Party and $70,000 to the National Party by simply donating 10 grand to each of the separate branches of either political party. Given the current coalition arrangements, the governing parties could receive undisclosed donations of up to $150,000 in funds from a single donor that they would not have to publicise.

As a result of this legislation, the political parties could receive multiple donations of $10,000 from inappropriate sources such as big tobacco companies and from sources that the AEC cannot effectively investigate, such as overseas donors, without having to provide a return to the AEC. In the 2004-05 financial year, the Liberal Party received a total of approximately $1,180,000 in donations from overseas. This of course included a $1 million donation from Lord Michael Ashcroft. Under the proposed changes the sources of over $34,500 in overseas donations will not require disclosure. The Labor Party have argued that the law in relation to overseas donations needs amending because it is too hard to trace the sources of the funds received by political parties. The changes outlined in this bill will only magnify the problems identified previously by Labor, making it even easier for the Liberal Party to hide the true source of its income.

A number of the government’s arguments for increasing the threshold limit were raised by Senator Abetz in his speech to the Sydney Institute in 2005. These arguments included the adverse effect of inflation on the current $1,500 threshold, the right to privacy of individuals and organisations who donate, that amounts of $10,000 and below were not enough to improperly influence political parties. These changes are not a simple case of the government adjusting the threshold to reflect changes in inflation. Increases in the CPI certainly would not have increased the current thresholds to $10,000. Independent research conducted by the Democratic Audit of Australia clearly demonstrates this. In fact, their report asserts that, when the effect of inflation is calculated into the existing $1,500 thresholds, it does not even come close to accounting for a third of the increase to $10,000.

Further, the government’s proposal that the thresholds should be indexed to inflation will only add unnecessary confusion for donors trying to work out whether or not they are required to disclose a donation. As the JSCEM minority report on the last election asserts:

This would see the amount increasing at around 2-2.5% a year. This is a fundamental break with the traditional way the disclosure of political donations has been regulated, and an annual measure could lead to confusion from donors as to whether their donation falls within, or outside, the disclosure limit.

The argument that these restrictions invade the privacy of donors ignores the fact that, when they donate to political parties, individuals and organisations are actively seeking to participate in the very appropriately public domain of Australian political life. When considering the right to privacy of these individuals and organisations, we must weigh these claims up against the right of Australians to know who contributes to political parties. Once
again, Labor contends that the $1,500 threshold strikes a good balance between the privacy rights of donors and the right of Australians to know who donates to political parties.

Senator Abetz’s claim that amounts of $10,000 and below are not enough to improperly influence political parties is a notion that has been widely disputed by leading academics. Joo-Cheong Tham from the Democratic Audit of Australia states:

… the observation that a $10,000 sum does not carry risk of undue influence or corruption is implausible.

Senator Abetz’s assertion completely ignores the fact that, as explained, a party can receive multiple donations from the same donor. This fact clearly increases the chances of corrupt behaviour; you would not have to be Einstein to work out that as the amounts of money increase so do the chances of inappropriate, or even corrupt, behaviour. The long and short of these changes is simple: more money will be donated to political parties and less of it will be open to public scrutiny.

The second part of this bill which makes it easier to donate to political parties pertains to an increase in the scope and size of the tax deductibility of political donations. Labor believes that the proposed increase from $100 to $1,500 for individuals or corporations and independent candidates is a completely inappropriate way to spend taxpayers’ money. It is just another example of the coalition government looking after themselves and their mates at the expense of ordinary Australians. According to the government’s own figures, it is estimated that these changes will slug Australian taxpayers to the tune of $22 million over four years.

Millions of dollars will flow from the pockets of hardworking Australians into the pockets of wealthy individuals and corporations. It is outrageous to think that the Australian taxpayer will be subsidising the donations of companies like Philip Morris, a company whose product already costs the Australian taxpayer millions every year. These changes have once again been roundly criticised by the experts. Mr Tham asserts:

If enacted, the proposal will entrench a blatantly unfair subsidy in the tax system.

These changes are designed to do nothing more than to encourage large donations to the coalition parties. As I stated earlier, this amendment is nothing more than a greedy grab for cash by the Howard government.

A final concern I would like to address relates to sections of the bill which seek to amend the financial disclosure obligations of third parties. Currently, third parties are required to submit a return to the AEC for any money spent on, or received to allow them to spend on, an electoral matter during an ‘election period’—defined as the period of time between the day on which the election writ is issued and the latest time on polling day that a person could lodge a vote. The bill proposes to change this reporting requirement so that a third party who comments on an ‘electoral matter’ at any time throughout any given year will be required to file an annual return with the AEC. An ‘electoral matter’ is defined extremely broadly and encompasses just about any comment or reference to current or past government or opposition policy and/or actions.

During the Senate legislation committee inquiry into this bill, it was revealed by the National Roundtable of Nonprofit Organisations, acting on legal advice, that, given the broad definition of an electoral matter and the proposed reporting obligations, this could mean that charity and community groups would be unable to even make passing reference to past or present public policy issues—greatly restricting their free speech; donors and the public would be scared away from donating to charities and community groups, because the bill would see them labelled as partisan political players; and the administrative burden on charities and community groups would be increased by requiring them to file annual financial returns with the AEC.

It was conceded by government senators during the inquiry that these were unintended consequences of the bill—in other words, the result of careless and sloppy drafting by the government. These mistakes provide yet another reason for the withdrawal of this bill. The minister should, at the very least, withdraw this bill until the careless mistakes of his government, which threaten to jeopardise the invaluable work of charity and community groups, are fixed.

Let me conclude my comments by reiterating why the Labor Party stands firmly opposed to this bill. If passed, this completely unjustified legislation will do nothing more than ensure that thousands of Australians will be unable to vote or deterred from voting at future federal elections and that millions of dollars will secretly flow to political parties. The government’s proposed changes are nothing more than a plan to make it a lot easier to secretly donate to influence the democratic process but a lot harder for Australians to actually exercise their
democratic rights. The bill ought to be condemned. The amendment ought to be passed. The government should take this back to the drawing board. The minister should move away from the movements of the previous minister in politicising the electoral system. (Time expired)