

ELECTORAL (LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL VOTING) (VOTER CHOICE) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Adjourned debate on second reading.

(Continued from 16 November 2016.)

Ms CHAPMAN: That is not to say that it does not have room for improvement, and the member for Davenport interjected to talk about terms of office and length of time. That may be something that needs to be looked at but, dealing with the issue of harvesting, it seems as though a consideration of the optional preferential models could be explored, and we should explore it.

The second thing I will say is that the Senate has dealt with this issue. It probably needs some extra refinement on how they deal with it, in providing for a vote of up to 12 spaces under the line in the Senate model, but I think it is desirable to be consistent with the federal regime. Certainly, the government does not seem to see this as important. I do, and from our side of the house we think that as much as possible we should minimise confusion for electors.

The Legislative Council is a complicated enough vote as it is. We try to make it easy by having laws which allow for people to have number one in a political party that is their preference, and they rely on that political party to have registered a ticket which will have the flow on from that according to that registered ticket. But we make it very hard for them if they elect to decide who they would want to have in preferences because they are left with myriad boxes which they have to fill in in consecutive order. Sadly, for those of us who do scrutineering, they often fail to do it correctly.

I think it is fair to say that there is a fair level of informality of those who complete the below the line method which perhaps could have been avoided if we had made it easier for them. I think we have to do everything we can in this place to try to remedy that. So, one option is to allow them to have up to 11 votes below the line and not require them to fill out the whole paper. What is the point, if they have gone to the first 11? That is an option for a preferential system where we could consider that, and it would have some consistency with what has been reformed for the Senate. Frankly, I think we need to be looking down that line.

Some time ago, before the Attorney tabled this bill, which does not have our support, it should not be unsaid that the Attorney had not acted to try to introduce some consideration in this space. That is, he had turned his mind to another model after the Sainte-Laguë light bulb moment and gave some consideration to another model which he sketched out for the benefit of some of us in the opposition. It started to have some merit, in my view, but for whatever reason, it was cast aside when he came up with this little gem and decided that he would go with this model.

It may be that he could not get his idea through the party room or the cabinet—I do not know—but I just make the point that, in fairness to him, he has tried to think of some options, but so far he is not succeeded in presenting to us something we think is sensible or consistent to minimise confusion to the elector, namely, with the federal system. In the event that the federal inquiry, which is a standing committee that they have in relation to electoral matters, were to introduce amendments to their system, then again we could have a look at those.

I was recently sent a submission to the federal committee which went to the 2016 federal election inquiry to the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters in Canberra which sets out a number of areas of reform that need to be considered, not all statutory. Some of it is in the educative material published by the Australian Electoral Commission and in the procedures for the implementation of some of the assessments. Although many of them are machinery operations, they are all important and we need to be forever vigilant in trying to ensure that we have the best system available.

Finally, who knows what the landscape is going to be like by the time we come to an election in March 2018. I note that the Animal Justice Party registered a couple of weeks ago as the newest South Australian political party, and there may be a lot more between now and the cut-off time prior to the March 2018 election. Some might disappear. We have quite a number of political parties in South Australia: we therefore have a fairly complex ballot paper in the sense of numbers of parties to be offered to the elector, and therefore I think we need to be very careful about how we progress this.

The Attorney gets some points for at least addressing his mind to this. I do not know entirely why he has dismissed the Senate model in coming up with his more novel approaches. The first two that he has come up with are not adequate or satisfactory from our side but we are happy to keep working on it.