

Western Australia follows on and introduces fixed parliamentary terms that will mean 80% of all electors in Australia will be voting in state elections with fixed parliamentary terms. It is a long way.

When we did come to government in 2001, we had a significant reform agenda regarding our electoral system in the Northern Territory. We established the Office of the Electoral Commissioner as an independent statutory office, rather than a division of the Department of Chief Minister. We introduced a minimum of three-year terms with a maximum of four and, now, we have moved to fixed four-year terms.

Regarding the Leader of the Opposition's comments on citizens' initiated referenda, I encourage all Territorians to continue the debate on parliamentary reform. Anything that we can do to stimulate debate about the workings of our democracy is a healthy thing. I have not done a great deal of study on citizens' initiated referenda. I can see the political, populous appeal, but the practicalities of it, and being hijacked by vested interest groups, would be a concern, and no other state in Australia has gone down that path. However, why not have a debate about it?

Member for Nelson mentioned shire and Northern Territory government elections being held on the same day, and talked about the recent US Presidential elections. That is something to have a debate about. I believe the big challenge that we face with the local government elections, as we move forward, is stimulating public debate in those elections to try to create some interest in them, with all due respect. If you went into any of our urban electorates and conducted a street poll, and asked people who their local aldermen were, most people would not know. I am sure that would be the same case with our shires and the newer elections in the shires. If you are trying to attract more attention and debate around local government issues, one thing that may occur by having the elections at the same time as the Northern Territory election is that it may dilute focus even further - that is something I can see. However, I am open for a debate on those things.

If you look at the US system where they do not have compulsory voting - and I have not seen the final numbers from the latest US Presidential election - normally only 40% to 50% of eligible people actually vote in the United States. If the object of the debate is to increase participation, understanding, and debate about the big issues as well as the smaller issues that face citizens, the fact that they have their Presidential, Senate, county and referenda voting all on the same day, lumping them all in together, I am not convinced actually raises awareness of those issues. Let us have a debate on those things.

I can see the pros and cons of a debate on government advertising and putting time frames around that but, at the end of the day, I believe our democratic system serves us well. My observation of our democracy is that if governments abuse their capacity and overstep the mark in that area, they are normally punished. People are not silly, and if they see governments abusing that particular privilege, I believe, normally, the Australian public and Territorians will see through that and take it out against the government of the day in the ballot box. However, again, in our evolution of our democracy, let us have a debate on it.

I thank everyone in the House today. This is another significant step forward in the evolution of our democracy. Once this bill passes, we all know that the next Territory election will be on Saturday, 25 August 2012. Terry; sitting here at the beginning of 2009 it seems a long way away, and who knows what water is going to go under the bridge, politically, in the Northern Territory between now and then. I know that all of us who have had the privilege of being elected to this House to represent our constituents will do the very best we can to serve the people of the Northern Territory; to serve our electorates between now and 25 August 2012, God willing.

Madam Speaker, I thank all members for their support for this legislation.

Motion agreed to; bill read a second time.

Mr HENDERSON (Chief Minister)(by leave): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; bill read a third time.

OMBUDSMAN BILL (Serial 25)

Continued from 26 November 2008.

Mr MILLS (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, the opposition has spent a fair amount of time assessing the intent and the capacity of this bill to do what has been described by government for the course the government has embarked upon. After that assessment, it is our intention to support this bill. Notwithstanding, there have been a number of issues that were, perhaps, contentious in such a complex matter as this. In the balance, and having consulted with stakeholders, we felt that we should allow this amendment bill to proceed with its intent.

It is an interesting word. Some of us who have been here for a while know that there was a former member for Brennan who had great difficulties in saying this word. He must have