

*QCB 211*  
**A nasty**

*OP GRAND*

**aign**

EXHIBIT No. *122*

*ATM* CLERK

**E**VER wondered what a city council by-election is really like?

Not at the public meetings, where candidates wax lyrical about their hard working nature, their independence, and their ability to get the job done.

Not in your letterbox, where glossy brochures predict the wonderful things that will be achieved should the candidate be elected.

Not at the polling booth, where friends and public figures yell ringing endorsements and thrust how-to-vote cards at residents.

Ever wondered what really goes on behind the scenes?

Well folks, like most other election campaigns held on the Gold Coast, the fight for the council seat in Division 14 has got it all. Sledging, backstabbing, rumour-mongering, and screaming.

When it comes to this election battle, accusations have been flying about more wildly than at a regular council meeting. And it all started way too quickly.

Before most residents had even heard about the tragic death of popular councillor Sue Robbins, campaign plans were being hatched.

One candidate unbelievably started canvassing *The Gold Coast Bulletin* for publicity just hours after her death last November.

In another questionable display, a potential candidate — who didn't end up nominating — rang up to claim a recent near-death experience made him perfect for the job.

It only took a couple more days for the rumour mill to pump into overdrive.

And since the campaign really wound into gear, it's got much worse.

*Bulletin* reporters have received regular calls from candidates relentlessly pushing their own barrel. That's all part and parcel of any election.

But instead of focusing on the issues and solutions, some have focused on each other.

Malicious intent and nasty rumours seem to rule the roost, rather than fact.

One aspirant rang up in a bid to reveal the candidates he claimed were part of the alleged council bloc, the candidates with dodgy business connections, and the candidates with political affiliations.

Surprise, surprise, he turned out to be the only true independ-



Voters have been subjected to a barrage of accusations



dent with a clean slate and impeccable reputation.

Dubious claims, especially considering that very same candidate failed to offer any decent policies, and hasn't ever since.

In the most mischievous performance of the election, an anonymous flyer entitled the Robbin's Roost was circulated around the division, disparaging all but a few candidates.

Returning officer Cec McPaul said it was the worst publication he had ever seen, which says something given the history of elections in this region. One hopes that residents would put it where it belongs — in the bin.

Other candidates have brought fairly reasonable claims to the newspaper's attention, but unfortunately, without a shred of proof.

Two claimed they had been

offered thousands in election funding before Christmas, potentially from developers.

The accusations drew interest, until the pair refused point blank to say who they had been approached by. Candidates, put up or shut up.

Then again, with some of the policies that are out there, it's no wonder people feel they need to play the man (or woman), instead of the ball.

A few eyebrows were raised at a recent public forum when one candidate announced she would use the GST paid by Division 14 residents to fix roads in the area.

Wonder what the Federal Government thinks about that?

Another candidate announced a plan to suspend development across the region for two years, a promise which is completely impractical, if not il-

legal. We couldn't quite get on the reporting of that issue.

He spent 15 minutes arguing (more like bellowing down phone), that the word 'intorium' should be used, instead of 'suspension'.

"You're misquoting on you say suspension," he yelled.

Check out the Macquarie dictionary — it means the same thing.

No sooner had the phone call ended than the same candidate rang the boss to complain about dubious journalistic integrity, or something like that.

The story hadn't even been published at the time.

This group of wannabes are quick to complain when chips don't fall their way.

My chief-of-staff informs me he has fielded several calls of a similar nature, calling my scalp.

One candidate screamed down the phone-line in anger after he was labelled a failed candidate in an article.

The fact that he lost the last election may have escaped his mind, but it has escaped mine.

Candidates have threatened legal action when stories about their adversaries have appeared.

They've even threatened to take articles to the pre-council.

All because of the audacity shown by outlining the policies of candidates, their election funding, their history in the area, and, in some cases, the clouding of the truth.

Embellishments have certainly reared their ugly heads during this campaign.

One candidate caused amusement when she insisted she was self-funded and totally independent.

During a phone conversation the next day, I was asked to hold the line.

"I've got the *Bulletin* on the phone and they want to know I'm self-funded, but I got \$50 from (inaudible)," she hissed to someone in the background trying in vain to cover the receiver with her hand.

She returned and I was assured: "Yep, I'm self-funded."

She was promptly informed I'd heard every word she said and forced to admit she had received a donation.

We're just not hoodwinked THAT easily.

It's got some tough competition, but that one takes the cake.