



Speech by

BRUCE DAVIDSON

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL APPROPRIATION BILL

Committee (Cognate Debate)

Estimates Committee D

Report

Mr DAVIDSON (Noosa—LP) (11.48 a.m.): I would like to recognise the Chair of Estimates Committee D, Mr Sullivan. I thought that he did a fairly good job. He was a bit tough in some areas and had to pull me up once or twice, but that is Terry. I congratulate him on getting through the process without too many dramas. His chairmanship of that committee and his cooperative working relationship with the staff was something that I appreciated. I thank him for that. I recognise the efforts of the staff, David Thannhauser and Penny Sullivan, and express my thanks to them. They were excellent and always available. I thank the Minister, Ms Spence, and her ministerial staff and departmental officers. I think they were as cooperative as they could be given the task at hand of having a new Minister in a new portfolio and going through the process of establishing her ministerial offices, departmental offices, director-general's office and so on. I thank her for her cooperation and endeavours to answer questions in a manner that was both acceptable to me and appreciated by me as a shadow Minister.

During the Estimates committee hearing I raised one or two issues that were of concern to me. This morning, in rising on a matter of privilege, I again raised the issue concerning the Premier and the appointment of Marg O'Donnell as the Director-General of the Minister's department. In this House, the Premier stated that any director-general who had no previous experience in Government would have to go through a formal application interview process. During the Estimates committee process, I was surprised to learn that the Minister had not adhered to that. In fact, Marg O'Donnell was appointed to that position by the Minister and that appointment was approved by the Premier without that position being advertised. As I said, that is now a matter for the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee.

I also find the Sagacity saga difficult to comprehend, given that the Minister was aware of Mr Ken Maddock's employment as a consultant by the Director-General, Marg O'Donnell. A \$10,000 consultancy fee was paid to Mr Maddock and two days after the completion of that consultancy he was appointed to a senior position in the department—an SES level position on some \$100,000 a year—without an interview process and without that position having been advertised in the Government Gazette before his appointment. I know that the position was advertised four or five days after his appointment, but it had not been advertised in the Gazette before his appointment. I was advised by one of the Minister's officers that Mr Maddock and Miss Marg O'Donnell had in their previous lives worked together in the former Departments of Attorney-General and Consumer Affairs. Obviously, they had some friendship and relationship in days gone by. I would not go as far as to say that it might have been an old mate's act in Mr Maddock receiving that consultancy or being appointed to a senior position within the Minister's department on \$100,000 a year without that position being advertised in the Gazette.

During the Estimates committee hearings, I raised another matter that has concerned me and that was that the Minister was not able to give an iron-clad commitment that the Retail Shop Leases Act would be administered by her department or by the Minister for State Development. She was quite uncertain and toing-and-froing, "It may be my department; it may be the State Development Department." She did not go so far as to say that it could be administered by some other department.

The Minister and the Government need to appreciate that small business and business generally across this State place a heavy reliance upon the work that is done for them by the officers who administer the Retail Shop Leases Act. I really believe that, as a matter of urgency, certainty should be given to the business community in this State as to who will be the Minister responsible for that Act and that it should be given a home as quickly as possible.

In closing, I thank the chairman, the staff, the Minister, her ministerial staff and the departmental staff. I think the process is worth while. I have often questioned whether the Estimates committees are essential to the administration of this Parliament, given the enormous cost and the time that it takes departmental officers to prepare and the enormous resources that are used in preparation for these hearings.

Time expired.
