



Speech by

GORDON NUTTALL

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

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Mr NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (12.03 p.m.): I would like to raise a couple of issues in relation to members' facilities. I also want to touch on some other issues that are a bit delicate at the moment, and they are the issues of salaries, allowances and superannuation. I believe that the facilities and the support that we receive from the staff at the Parliament are first rate. I take this opportunity to thank all the people who work at Parliament House for the support that they give to me and to my electorate office. I would like to put that on the public record.

Mr McGrady: What about your florist?

Mr NUTTALL: My florist, who is at Education House, does a great job. As I said, I want to touch on the issue of salaries and allowances. The Australian Taxation Office deems all of our allowances as income. It is appropriate that we currently have the Select Committee on Parliamentary Entitlements looking at the issue of the entitlements of members of Parliament, because I think that is an important issue to consider.

I believe it is grossly unfair that electorates such as Kallangur, which has in excess of 30,000 constituents, receive the same allowance as electorates that have 19,000 or 20,000 constituents. In terms of the members' postage allowance, I think it is grossly unfair to ask a member of Parliament who represents an electorate of 30,000 constituents to communicate with his or her constituents on the same level as a member who has fewer than 20,000 constituents. Basically, the members' postage allowance entitles a member to send one letter per household in his or her electorate per year. In terms of trying to communicate with one's electorate, that is by no stretch of one's imagination a large allowance.

Mr Sullivan: Even Energex writes to us four times a year.

Mr NUTTALL: That is right. In terms of salaries, superannuation and other benefits to members, I believe that, from the way the debate about such issues is heading, we as a nation are in danger of not being able to attract people with the necessary abilities to give their time to public life because of the lack of remuneration. I believe that, at times, we are our own worst enemy: regardless of the decision that we make about our salaries and allowances, it will not be popular with the public.

As I said, it is timely that the Select Committee on Parliamentary Entitlements looks at the issue of members' entitlements. However, the committee should not look at the issue from the point of view of what benefits members should have and should not have; it should look at the issue in terms of proper remuneration so that members can do their jobs and so that the right type of people are attracted to dedicating themselves to public life. Until such time as we address those issues in a bipartisan way, people with ability and talent will certainly not put up their hands to be members of Parliament.

In the past we have attacked each other on such issues. I think it is time we stopped that. In my view, there is no better scrutiny of members' entitlements than what we currently have, that is, the Register of Members' Interests. The arrangements that have been in place since the early 1990s have

cleared up any problems that we have had in relation to our travel entitlements. Last year the Auditor-General conducted an audit of many members' travel claims and every one of them was cleared. That was because the system that we have works very, very well. It makes people accountable.

Mr Veivers: It's the best in Australia.

Mr NUTTALL: The member for Southport is right when he says that it is the best in Australia. I am happy to be accountable, as are, I am sure, the other 88 members of this Parliament. However, we need to address seriously the issue of remuneration for all members.

Time expired.
