



Speech by

Hon. J. FOURAS

MEMBER FOR ASHGROVE

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Committee (Cognate Debate)

Estimates Committee A

Report No. 1

Hon. J. FOURAS (Ashgrove—ALP) (12.24 p.m.): I am pleased to join the debate on the Estimates of the Legislative Assembly. Firstly, I wish to speak about the education services provided by the Parliament. I am very pleased that when I was Speaker we set up an education office, because I fervently believe that the electorate at large should know whether this Parliament is meeting the levels of accountability and scrutiny that are expected of it. If it is not doing so, the public should be well aware of that so that they can jump up and down and try to change that situation.

Although the Parliament conducts tours for schoolchildren and they are able to observe the behaviour of members and the beauty of this building, citizenship studies need to be enhanced, and the Department of Education needs to do more than it is presently doing in that regard.

I wish also to speak about our electorate offices and officers. The other day, my electorate officer attended a housing seminar run by the Housing Minister and was instructed, for example, on the guidelines for priority housing so that that officer is able to give proper advice to constituents. In many ways, a member of Parliament is a highly paid messenger boy. Our electorate officers are part of that process of providing information to the public in relation to departmental services. A similar seminar to that offered by the Minister for Housing should also be offered by other Ministers. In the next week or so, my electorate officer will be receiving further computer training. That is extremely good, and I commend the Speaker for finding the resources to provide that training.

Technology is changing very rapidly. When I was the Speaker, about four or five years ago I was advised that we needed to do something about the computer network cabling in the Parliamentary Annexe; that we needed to go to fibre-optic cabling. I am pleased to see that that is provided for in this Budget.

I wish to speak very briefly also about the Parliamentary Catering Service. When I was Speaker, there was some pressure to privatise that service. It was suggested that we should pay a large subsidy to a catering group, because that is what other Parliaments had done. I am very pleased that we were able to resist that push in this Parliament. A Parliament's catering service should be the centrepiece reflecting the status of one's State. The catering services in other Parliaments are second rate compared with ours. I am glad that we did not go that way.

A similar situation applied with respect to Hansard. For example, the economic rationalists were telling us that we would save a lot of money by giving the State Reporting Bureau the right to tape-record the proceedings of Parliament. The independence of the Parliament would have been lost. The problem with that advice that the then Premier was getting was that it was absolutely flawed. The actual savings that that would have brought about were nowhere near what the Premier at the time was being told they would have been. It is very good that this Parliament has been able to maintain its independence through the provision of services that are specific to it. We do not want ever again to talk about privatising catering or sending Hansard to the State Reporting Bureau.

With respect to the building, ever since I have been here I have noticed that we have been trying to find extra space. For example, we have built on top of the Conference Room and the dining

rooms downstairs, and there are now some nice meeting rooms on the fifth floor. We are running out of space. There is no doubt that somewhere down the track some Government will have to find the will and the money to build accommodation between the Parliamentary Library and the QUT. That is where our offices should be. They should be right next to the Chamber. At some stage we will have to find that space. I was pleased to hear the member for Gladstone saying that the refurbishment has been achieved without a political bunfight. We need to have that commonsense approach and goodwill to make sure that we can get that facility. Ultimately, we are becoming cramped for space. Hopefully, in the future a Treasurer will say that we can find the money to provide that additional space.

In conclusion, can I say that the atmosphere outside of this Chamber is better than that inside it. The staff are wonderful in the way in which they impartially look after the interests of all members. That makes it easier to come here. Before some sitting weeks I say to myself, "I am going to Parliament, but the staff here look after us so well." I am pleased to acknowledge their good work.

Time expired.
