



Speech by

Mrs E. CUNNINGHAM

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard 21 October 1998

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Committee (Cognate Debate)

Estimates Committee A

Report No. 1

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—IND) (12.09 p.m.): Before discussing issues relating to Estimates Committee A, I want to make a general comment on the Estimates process. In a 1992 committee bulletin, Peter Morris, a former member of Parliament, was initially very critical of the Estimates committee process. He talked about the armies of senior departmental officers who spend hour after hour, day after day, in the corridors waiting for their turn.

I was a member of Estimates Committee C, not Estimates Committee A, and I was very thankful for the approach of the non-Government members. Vaughan Johnson led the charge to ensure that very few departmental senior officers were made to stand around unnecessarily, waiting all day for what may only be one question. In this year's Estimates, the departmental senior administrators from outside the central Brisbane area were not required to be in attendance unless one of the members specifically requested it. That attitude was certainly refreshing to see.

According to the bulletin, Mr Morris went on to say that, despite criticisms, he supported the principle of Estimates committee scrutiny. Quoting Mr Morris, the bulletin states—

" 'The Estimates Committee process is an aid to the Parliament's scrutiny function and a means of improving the contact of public administration' by 'challenging public servants'—

and I would add Ministers—

"to lift their standards.' "

Both public servants and Ministers are accountable officers in the committee process. Whilst I think we may get a little too adversarial in the Estimates committee process, it still provides a great opportunity for us to examine the expenditure of the various departments on behalf of the community.

While discussing Estimates Committee A, I wish to thank a number of people. Remuneration and entitlement issues have been raised, and in this regard I shall take some time to acknowledge the work and the support that my constituents and I have received over the past 12 months and, indeed, over the term of the previous Government. My electorate officer, Kitty McDonald, works well beyond her designated hours, as I am sure all electorate officers do. Electorate officers have a great rapport with the people who come into the offices. Indeed, they are the linchpins in the offices as they are the first point of contact. We all value the support that the Speaker of the House provides to the electorate officers. I know that at the moment committees are reviewing the matter of entitlements.

I particularly wish to thank the staff of Parliament House. Over the past four years, to me they have been a very constant, very fair and very nice group of people to have contact with. I have never seen them demonstrate any partiality that could offend. They are very pleasant in their dealings with people and in great measure they determine the environment that we come to work in when Parliament is sitting. I speak of all facets of the staff, from security, Corporate Services, the library, catering, Hansard—the whole gamut of people who work here. Mr Speaker, I ask you to pass on our

appreciation for their accessibility and their affability, which really makes a day or a week here much more tolerable.

I turn now to the care, which has continued under the previous Speaker and the current Speaker, of the asset that is Parliament House. It has been very pleasant to see that the modifications to, rehabilitation and maintenance of the House have not become a party-political issue. This is an invaluable asset for our community. Every young person who sees it must be impressed, not by us but by the custodianship of all the people who have looked after the old building and by the fact that it is being preserved for posterity, is something to be very proud of and needs the allocation of funds to ensure its maintenance. We lose so much history and this piece of history is invaluable. I commend the current Speaker and the previous Speakers for their support in this area.

As a woman, I value the accommodation that is made available to members because of its security and proximity. I am sure that all members value it, because it is very easily accessed and it is available to us whether the House is sitting or not.

Time expired.
