



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Hansard 21 October 1998

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Committee (Cognate Debate)

Estimates Committee A

Report No. 1

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (11.36 a.m.): At the outset I join with the previous speaker in thanking the staff of Estimates Committee A—the research directors, Leanne Nielsen and Kerryn Newton, research officer Meg Hoban, and executive assistants Mandy Elcome and Maree Lane. We always got very courteous and excellent assistance.

Today I will particularly talk about electorate offices and about the Parliament itself. The Parliament itself, particularly for many of us from country or regional electorates, is our home, one might say—where we stay for large chunks of the year. That particularly relates to Ministers, shadow Ministers and those who have senior leadership positions. They need to be in this place for substantial amounts of time. It has been good over the past couple of years to see a few little things being done to the facilities here. I do not think any of us wants to see anything flash; we just want modest accommodation. I compliment the previous Speaker for what he did in making the place a little nicer. I also thank the current Speaker for continuing with that work.

People do spend a lot of time here. I remember some media articles in the paper in the past couple of years about the Parliament and the fact that members of Parliament had these great views, silver service and all the rest of it. The silver service we get on the weekends is putting \$2 into the slot in the machine downstairs to get a packet of Smiths Crisps or a Mars bar. I do not think any of us are complaining about that but, to keep things in perspective, members do have a single room. It is handy to be able to do the work we have to do when we come to Brisbane.

I compliment the Speaker for visiting the electorate offices. I know that those visits have been greatly appreciated. The Speaker has been able to sit down and have a cup of tea with some of our electorate officers and talk to them about particular issues.

We have seen an upgrade of security in recent years. That has been excellent and that must be maintained. Breaches of security only happen once in a while. They happen out of the blue and they can be very frightening.

Mr Sullivan: I will vouch for that.

Mr HORAN: They can be very frightening for our staff. I do not know what we can do to stop trucks. I know that, in our own case, there have been some instances in which the electorate officers—many of whom are females—have been quite frightened at times, particularly in relation to drug-related issues. So we are appreciative of security being put in place and being maintained in our electorate offices.

There is one issue that concerns my office in particular. We have been endeavouring to get an email service into the office for four months. However, it has been very difficult, and we have not been able to do it. This has made things difficult, particularly during a recent telephone hook-up regarding the Estimates process. We wanted some information from Hansard, and Hansard staff were a bit disappointed when they could not provide that information electronically.

The previous speaker mentioned the \$10,000 allocation for electorate office staff. That is greatly appreciated. An enormous amount of work is undertaken in electorate offices now, with faxes, mobile phones, email and all the rest of it—although we do not have email yet. There is an enormous burden of work. People want information back straightaway, and it is beyond the capacity of a single electorate secretary to handle a lot of this burden. So that extra \$10,000 allowance is greatly appreciated.

The previous speaker also mentioned electorates that are above the average size. This Parliament should consider what happens to some of the rural members of Parliament. I have an inner-city electorate, like many of the Brisbane ones. In common with most of the Brisbane members, I can get anywhere within my electorate in 10 or 15 minutes. But that is not the case in some of the country electorates. For example, the member for Callide looks after Biggenden, Gayndah, Mundubbera, Monto and right up to Biloela, then out west through Moura to Rolleston, and then down the other side of the Great Dividing Range to Theodore, Taroom and Wandoan. That electorate does not have a weightage, and the member has to travel huge distances. For some of my colleagues, including the members for Gregory, Warrego and Charters Towers, it is nothing to drive four or five hours to a meeting and then drive four or five hours to get home after the meeting.

There are huge burdens on the larger electorates in Queensland. It must be considered that we are very different from some of the smaller States of Australia and other smaller countries. One of the things that people are feeling in the rural and regional parts of the State is that they want to see their member. People say, "Give them more resources." They do not want to see resources; they want to see the member. People will have a cup of tea with my electorate secretary. Members have cups of tea with their constituents.

Time expired.
