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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL
Committee (Cognate Debate)
Estimates Committee A
Report No. 1

Mr ROBERTSON (Sunnybank—ALP) (12.15 p.m.): When I put my hand up to speak in this Estimates committee debate, I intended to speak about what I perceive to be the particular needs of members with respect to information technology. However, as speaker after speaker has mentioned this topic, I will take a slightly different approach to the issues at hand.

In relation to the demands for upgraded information technology—both hardware and software—in our offices, electorates or, indeed, in this place, a number of members have stood up and said, "I would like a laptop", "I would like another computer", "I would like a network", or whatever. I do not disagree with that approach and, indeed, it was going to be my original approach. In the past I have been guilty of telling successive Speakers that it would be great to have another computer, and I understand that the current Speaker is dedicated to the task. However, while listening to the contributions of members from both sides of the House, it occurred to me that perhaps we are approaching the issue in the wrong way.

If we are to upgrade information technology, it would be wrong to approach the matter by saying that we should appropriate money just to give everyone an extra computer. We need to take a more holistic approach by looking at the needs of members in the late 1990s and into the next century, and work back from that point. I say that on the basis of my current duties as Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Premier, with an interest in industry innovation and technology diffusion. It seems to me that basically the Legislative Assembly is falling well behind current standards of use of information technology and innovation in the use of that technology. As I understand it, Mr Speaker has set up a small working group to look at this issue and I hope that it takes a holistic approach.

We also need to establish some benchmarks for what we are trying to achieve. For example, we need to ask: are we keeping up with the services and technology that are at the disposal of Federal members? I suggest not. Are we keeping up with the services that are offered by Brisbane City councillors in their ward offices? I suggest that, again, the answer is no. We need to establish some benchmarks, rather than just spending money on extra computers, printers or whatever.

Mr Sullivan: That's what they're doing.

Mr ROBERTSON: I am pleased that the member for Chermside says that that is the case. I was merely putting forward a suggestion, for what it is worth.

Previously I have spoken to the Speaker about staff allowances, the introduction of which I believe was a great move. However, that allowance has now been in place for two years and it has not increased. At the very least it should be increased according to the CPI. If the allowance is not increased as the hours worked start to increase, there will be a real reduction in the number of hours at our disposal. Personally, I believe that we should incrementally increase the allowance far beyond the CPI, thus increasing the number of hours of part-time work that can be put at our disposal.

As other members have done, I wish to pay some compliments to the staff of this place, particularly of the Protocol Office. Given the composition of my electorate, I often call on the Protocol Office to conduct tours for overseas guests who visit my constituents for vacations or for business. Time after time the Protocol Office has been at my disposal to assist with those guests. The protocol officers' sensitivity towards different cultural needs is greatly appreciated. The Protocol Office is an incredibly professional office and is of great value to this Assembly.

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