



Speech by

**Mr T. SULLIVAN**

**MEMBER FOR CHERMSIDE**

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Hansard 21 October 1998

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Committee (Cognate Debate)**

**Estimates Committee A**

**Report No. 1**

**Mr SULLIVAN** (ChermSIDE—ALP) (11.41 a.m.): I rise to support report No. 1 of Estimates Committee A. I also wish to address the work of electorate officers, who are the members for many constituents who phone or drop into members' electorate offices when we are in Parliament, on committee work or in another part of the electorate. Our electorate officers are the front line of contact for our constituents. How they handle an initial inquiry has a great effect on how we are perceived to be working, or not working, properly for our constituents.

As the previous member pointed out, security is a problem. I do have a problem with the response times when the duress button is pushed. There have been a number of occasions when officers have accidentally pressed the button or they have felt threatened and have pressed it, but it was 25 to 30 minutes before a metropolitan police officer responded to the electorate office. I know of circumstances in which the Department of Social Security and the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care have forbidden single officers to meet with certain constituents. They have said, "No women. There must be two males meeting with this person because of the person's threatening and abusive nature." Yet our electorate officers are single operators—sometimes part-time workers—and they can feel very threatened.

I believe that the information technology resources of our electorate offices need to be upgraded. I disagree slightly with the former speaker from this side of the Chamber, who said that maybe members could get second-hand computers and set them up. What we need are good, portable computers that will link into the mother computers in our offices. It is important that when members are on committee work, when they are in Parliament and when they are out of their electorate offices they are able to do work so that, when they return to their offices, they can simply plug their computers into the network and the electorate officer or they themselves can generate material.

In most electorate offices, the electorate officer has a phone and a computer system around him or her. When someone comes to the front door, that officer is also the receptionist. That is not very conducive to good work. Our constituents expect us to reply to them, and reply in good time, but that cannot happen unless we have the basic tools to be able to do that. Time can also be wasted when a member is working with the electorate officer on a particular issue and the phone rings, because that matter has to be attended to before they can resume work. That is inefficient.

The member for Nicklin has impressed me with the number of things that he has contributed to this Parliament. In relation to the review of members' entitlements, he has a very strict eye on what is going to be happening. I ask him to use basic office procedures and basic private enterprise standards as the criteria upon which to judge the Parliamentary Service. I know of no person who is an administration officer, an AO2 in Government or a receptionist in a small business who does not have his or her own workstation. Yet members do not have that in their electorates. I would like to hold a competition to see whether any other State office in Queensland provides its staff with a vacuum cleaner and says, "Go and do your own vacuum cleaning." That quaint little practice has been retained in our electorate offices. I look forward to getting on video our Ministers vacuuming their offices and the CEOs doing theirs, as well. That should be good.

It is unfortunate that members of Parliament are often the target of media campaigns to the effect that we are here indulging in the perks. This issue has been referred to previously by some members. It strikes me as ironic that, when they are talking about the perks, those very same journalists have been enjoying the cut-price meals and service in this very precinct. They are also provided with free accommodation for their studios, but they want to talk about other people's perks. By the way, they are happy to travel on ministerial planes and to accompany parliamentarians, but I guess that just goes with the job. It is very destructive of the whole of our democracy, and it is about time that some journalists grew up and started to act like journalists, not crusaders for some petty cause.

I wish to thank the Parliamentary Service personnel. I had the opportunity to be with the new members on the induction days; many of them said how helpful the members of the Parliamentary Service are. I thank all those who work in this precinct. I suppose that sometimes members can take them for granted after a few years, but we do appreciate the security, the catering, the attendants, the Table Office and Hansard staff—everyone who helps us in our job.

Time expired.

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