



Speech by

Hon. D. HAMILL

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

Hansard 24 August 2000

APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E

Hon. D. J. HAMILL (Ipswich—ALP) (Treasurer) (12.12 p.m.): It was interesting to listen to the ravings of the Deputy Leader of the National Party complaining that the Budget material contains too many figures, too much information; that it was a bit difficult for him to be able to comprehend what is in there. If he and other Opposition members took the time to study the information, they might actually find the answers to some of the more arcane issues that they were supposedly going to try to pursue during the Estimates process.

Some of us who have a bit of memory about the parliamentary process in the Queensland Parliament can compare very starkly the performance of the Estimates of today with what it was like when the National Party sat on these benches in the Bjelke-Petersen era. In those days the Estimates process was a total farce. They used to select only three departments in a year to have their Estimates debated. Of course, the selection never included any of the controversial ones. There was no opportunity to ask questions of Ministers or indeed pursue matters with public servants—no, no, no. If ever there was a period when there was no transparency and no accountability in Government it was those days. The only reason that anyone could come in here and claim that this Estimates process does not offer transparency would be that the person asking the question was so bone lazy as to not have done their homework in order to ask pertinent questions in relation to the Estimates.

Let me refer to certain aspects of the Opposition members' report in relation to the Treasury Department Estimates. I find it passing strange—and I assume that the member for Moggill would have authored this part of the Opposition members' statement—that he has some concern as to the accuracy of the Budget figures. The Budget papers as they have been prepared in other years, and indeed under other Governments, contain figures for estimated actuals. Why? That is because the data on which those calculations are made is data which has been put together prior to the end of the financial year and prior to the accounts being audited.

For the information of the honourable member, I point out that the estimated actual figures which are published in the Ministerial Portfolio Statements were based on the best estimates that were able to be derived at a point in time. These figures were calculated initially as at the end of April 2000 based on data at the end of March 2000. Where apparent, initial calculations were adjusted for any known material variances.

It is also worth noting—and perhaps the honourable member for Moggill might take this to heart—that under the Financial Administration and Audit Act all accountable officers are obliged to furnish to the Auditor-General general purpose financial statements within two months of the year end, that is, by 31 August. We are not going to get actual figures until after that process has been concluded. For the information of the honourable member, I point out that today's date is 24 August. How on earth does he expect to have actual figures for a Budget paper presented on 18 July? The honourable member is not only misguided but also unreasonable.

The other points I wanted to make in relation to the honourable member's expectations relate to the extraordinary statements on page 8 of Estimates Committee E Report No. 2, where he states—

"The failure of the Treasurer to meet the legislative deadlines contained in the Financial Administration and Audit Act pertaining to the reporting on the consolidated State accounts 1999/2000 is of great concern."

The honourable member should listen to this. Under the Financial Administration and Audit Act we have another four months to go before the deadline approaches in relation to the audited data for 1999-2000. What on earth is he on about?

That was almost as good as the other performance of the member for Moggill in the Estimates committee hearing when he decided to ask a penetrating question about alleged cuts in Housing. He asked why the Government was cutting Housing. We were able to ascertain that the circumstances arose from a policy decision taken while the honourable member for Moggill was a Minister in the coalition Government. It cut Housing payments, and that was factored into the Forward Estimates. The absent-minded professor—the erstwhile Minister for Housing—shot himself in both feet simultaneously at the Estimates committee hearing. Such was the calibre of the honourable member that he shot himself in both feet simultaneously. It was a great performance and indicative of the sloppiness and tardiness of an incompetent Opposition.
