



Speech by

Mr L. SPRINGBORG

MEMBER FOR WARWICK

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APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Mr SPRINGBORG (Warwick—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.36 p.m.): As an introduction to my contribution, I would like to commend the chairman, the member for Bulimba, for the conduct of the committee. On a couple of occasions now I have had the pleasure of being able to participate in Estimates Committee B under his chairmanship, and he has always been an extremely fair chairman. He keeps the business of the Estimates committee moving along, as he does the meetings prior and subsequent to that. I also thank the other members of the committee, the staff who service the requirements of the committee and the officers of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, who came along to provide information.

I have some general reservations about the use and value of Estimates committees. We get to ask about 15 questions—it is the same for us in Opposition as it was when the current Government was in Opposition. At the end of the day, I wonder if the process is about seeking information or being able to completely get access to information, because of the political prerogative that no doubt comes into it. I also think that sometimes we have a great wealth of knowledge and experience in the departmental officers sitting there backing up the Ministers. Those departmental officers, who actually have the knowledge, should be invited by the Ministers to come forward and give the facts of the matter without the political padding that sometimes goes with it. I suppose that Estimates committees fulfil an important role, but I wonder if their role is as valuable or as good as it could be.

I have put in a statement of reservations because there are some issues with regard to the Ministerial Portfolio Statements for the Department of Justice and Attorney-General which concern me very much. They are matters that I raised during the course of the Estimates committee hearing to which I received from the Attorney-General totally unsatisfactory answers. Those matters related to the bonuses for the director-general, the use of a departmental vehicle by the director-general and the freedom of information process which, although the Attorney-General certainly provided some information about on the day, did not seem to be backed up by reality. However, I think that he has probably moved to clarify that in the time subsequent to those hearings.

I would like to touch on the issue of bonuses, because it is one of the most disgraceful things that we have seen from this Government. It is expecting us to cop the fact that it is paying bonuses to directors-general who, in many cases, are performing in an extremely mediocre way at a maximum level. What is the accountability of this Government all about? We go into an Estimates committee and ask questions and seek information. Yet the Minister sits there and says, "It is nothing to do with me; it is to do with the Premier." However, the individual contracts for the directors-general state that the matter of a bonus is an issue between either them and the Premier or the Premier and the Minister. There needs to be some sort of scrutiny and performance criteria against which these things can be assessed.

Mr Malone: Paid out of the departmental budget.

Mr SPRINGBORG: It is paid out of the departmental budget. I was going to come to that point. During the course of the Estimates committee process the Attorney-General admitted under questioning that the amount of money required to pay the bonus for the director-general came out of his budget. I would have thought it was a matter of direct scrutiny for that particular committee. Also, the question was put to the Attorney-General whether he liaised with the Premier or provided

information to the Premier about the necessary performance criteria for the payment of that bonus. He conceded, "Yes", but he said that it had absolutely nothing to do with him; it was a matter for the Premier. The only thing that I can say in fairness to the Attorney-General is that all of the other Ministers said exactly the same thing. It was a great cover-up. This is basically a way of delivering largesse—

Mr Horan: Anna Bligh let the cat out of the bag.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Anna Bligh, the Minister for Families, went the closest to letting the cat out of the bag. This is a way of delivering largesse at the expense of the taxpayers whilst hiding it from the people of Queensland. This is from the Premier who cartwheels around the State talking about openness, accountability and transparency. However, he is not prepared to be transparent in the most fundamental of areas. The people of Queensland need to know that the director-general of the department is being paid according to performance.
