



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 24 August 2000

APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (12.02 p.m.): I thank the committee for its report and its support of the expenditure proposals for which I have a responsibility. The minority of the committee have noted some reservations, which simply replicate the superficial political point scoring that they presented at the hearing, and which I dealt with in full during that hearing. So they are not worthy of response today. The Opposition does not let the facts get in the way of a good whinge.

It needs to be recorded that during my 10 and a half, almost 11 years in this place, I have never witnessed such an appallingly sloppy and ill-prepared attempt at parliamentary scrutiny than the Opposition's participation in this Estimates process. The member for Burnett did not ask me questions, because my responsibilities lie outside his shadow portfolio responsibilities. However, that lowered the tone of the committee as well because, had he asked me questions, I think that it would have been a better performance by the Opposition. The Opposition simply did not do their homework. Labor in Opposition worked hard to scrutinise in detail the Budget Estimates. In contrast, the Nationals and the Liberals seemed to base their investigation upon a cursory glance of the Budget papers, never letting the facts get in the way of a question. Of course, if the Opposition had dug further, they would have found everything to be in order, but they did not even try. Frankly, Queenslanders deserve better than the Opposition that is currently serving it.

I refer to performance bonuses. I have provided the committee with the full details of what bonuses are available to directors-general if they perform. It is a maximum of 15%, which for the highest paid DGs means a maximum bonus of \$29,700. Of course, the bonus could also be zero. That is up to my discretion, after an appropriate assessment process, as the employer of these DGs. It needs to be remembered that the accountability for the performance of these departments to the Parliament resides in the respective Minister.

In terms of the size of the department, it was explained at the hearings that a straight comparison of staff figures over the past few years cannot be made. The latest figures include 70 staff providing corporate services to State Development, which the earlier figures did not include. Despite that explanation, the Opposition still used the straight comparison.

In terms of the Opposition's budget, I note that it pleads that its \$300,000 budget blow-out is not true because the travel costs of the leadership group have been transferred from the Parliament to my budget. Even if that point is accepted, those travel costs add up to only \$60,000. It would not be a \$300,000 blow-out; it would be a \$240,000 blow-out, representing an extra 10% of their budget allocation. My office came in \$25,000 under budget.

That is my formal response. I do not think that there is anything else in the dissenting report that needs consideration. I pay tribute to the chairman, who I thought handled the committee impeccably and tried to do a fair job. I think the vicious attack on her today by the Leader of the Opposition was simply another whinge. It seems to me that personal abuse has become very much part of the armour of the Leader of the Opposition. I find that at every opportunity he is out to viciously attack people. He did it to an independent public servant, Helen Ringrose, who cannot defend herself. He talked about her being Robespierre—name calling, which is hardly befitting the behaviour of a man who claims that he wants to be the Premier of this State. I know that these are frustrating times, but he has to learn to

bite his tongue. Mine has bumps on it. Nevertheless, the Leader of the Opposition has to learn some discipline.

The Leader of the Opposition does not seem to like independent people. He does not like the independent Speaker, whom he attacked this morning, and he does not like Independents. He attacked Peter Wellington and, by inference perhaps, the member for Gladstone. He attacked the independent CJC. The Leader of the Opposition just does not like independent people. His behaviour is like that of a spoilt brat. Frankly, I think that the behaviour of the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament this morning was nothing short of a disgrace. We all have responsibilities to lift the standards of Parliament. None of us are perfect. We all make mistakes. I do, too. However, for the Leader of the Opposition to come in here and have a serial, deliberate strategy to disrupt the Parliament—which we saw—and to use the Estimates committees as part of a continuation of that behaviour, is simply unacceptable.

If the Leader of the Opposition thinks that the community supports that sort of behaviour, I tell him that they do not. They are sick of it, and they are sick of politicians. Do members want to know why the community does not like politicians? Because of what the Leader of the Opposition did today. He tore up the rule book, he tore up Standing Orders. He decided that he is God—better than rest of us and better than this institution, which we inherited from our predecessors. We have to appreciate the history, the conventions and the importance of this Parliament for which we are responsible.

The Estimates committee process is the most open process of Budget scrutiny. It was started in the Goss years. During those committees, Ministers have to sit down and be questioned, as they should be. Yes, it has to be a robust process. I accept all of that. But for the Opposition to continue this personal denigration, this attack on independence and Independents, which we have seen today and on previous occasions, I believe is unparliamentary. I think that it denigrates the process and I think that it is unacceptable.

I thank the majority of the committee for supporting the Estimates process. This has been a solid Budget and it will continue good government in this State.
