



Speech by

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ELECTRONIC TRANSACTIONS (QUEENSLAND) BILL

Ms STRUTHERS (Algeria—ALP) (6.52 p.m.): Not all members in this House would consider themselves IT competent. In fact, many of us have a bit of trouble accessing a lot of information technology. As part of the Smart State, and being leaders within the Smart State, most of us are trying very hard to sharpen our skills. I am in that category.

If we do not encourage young kids in schools, friends and families to use the Internet and access information technology, we risk having many people who are part of the digital divide. Although we as members of parliament have a lot of access to IT, we are not always making good use of that. I think it is important that we show leadership and demonstrate to others that it is important to keep up with the latest technology.

It is essential that all members support this bill. E-commerce is becoming a way of life. We must have the appropriate legislative regimes in place to both facilitate and regulate these systems. The bill lays the foundation for more people to communicate with government on line and to enter into electronic contracts with government. All of that makes for more efficient business and a more efficient use of technology. Also, I think many of us are keen to save trees and avoid paper. In our job we see a lot of that, and I believe that these sorts of things are critical as we move into the future.

Mr Springborg: But does it save paper?

Ms STRUTHERS: We have to find ways to make sure we do. I am concerned about the information poor in my own electorate. When I visit people's homes, I do not see many computers. It is important that, through Education Queensland, we continue to improve the ratio of computers to students. It was certainly pleasing to see in last year's budget a significant improvement there, and hopefully that will be continued in successive budgets.

Adult Internet users tend to be younger, male, earning in excess of \$75,000, employed and living in metropolitan areas. If that trend continues, it will be the people in the Aboriginal communities, older people and the people on lower incomes who will be part of the information poor and part of that digital divide. It is certainly important that we make every effort to improve Internet access for all people.

This government has been committed to making sure that Queensland is the Smart State, and some very significant and important information technology strategies are being actively promoted and implemented by this government. They have included the ones I mentioned in regard to computer access in schools, the Queensland government Internet gateway and the Queensland government marketplace. We have recognised, too, that we have significant information technology skill shortages in this state, and we have a number of strategies to rectify that problem. So there are a number of very positive things happening, and this bill goes some way towards putting in place both a facilitative regime and, to some extent, a regulatory regime.

Some of the unfinished e-business that we have to attend to as a matter of some urgency relates to issues of confidentiality and privacy of e-commerce in Queensland. Many of us, and many businesses, still remain pretty fearful of where our personal details will end up in cyberspace. If we buy a product, if we enact a contract or if we lodge a tender on line, where does that information end up? Where will the receiver of that information use that information? So it is important to make sure that we have proper processes and systems in place into the future to enhance confidentiality and privacy.

I have looked at some of the research on how many web sites, for instance, provide security and privacy policies and practices, and there are very few. Something like 40 per cent to 50 per cent have some sort of privacy policy, but only 20 per cent or so actively promote and publish those on line. Many of us have grave concerns that any of our legal, financial and other details might be misused, intercepted on line or lost somewhere and not end up where they are supposed to end up. Those fears need to be overcome so that people will access e-commerce more than they are at the moment. Digital signature legislation may provide some remedy, but comprehensive guidelines are needed to secure electronic transactions. So at this stage I certainly think this is an important step that we are taking through this bill. It lays an important foundation. But we still have some unfinished e-business.
