



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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PARLIAMENTARY SERVICE AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (3.00 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Parliamentary Service Amendment Bill. The need for this bill arises from the Beattie government's promise to take parliament out of the south-east corner. The current plan, which screams of a waste of taxpayers' funds, is the proposal by this Beattie government to hold a parliamentary sitting in Townsville in September. It is a noble idea that people in the north of the state be able to witness parliament at work, but I would have thought that current forms of technology, which see federal parliament televised and Internet access available to many, have in fact made parliament much more available and have opened it up to far greater scrutiny than could one staged performance in the north.

This trip north may eliminate the feeling that north Queenslanders have of not being associated with parliament, of being apart from the decision makers. Community consultative meetings are held in various towns throughout the state to allow people to access ministers on behalf of a community delegation or on a one-on-one basis. The Premier and his ministers spend a few days hearing and seeing first hand the concerns of these communities. I congratulate the government on that concept, because its ministers do get to communities that may never have seen any parliamentary staff. Whether or not communities feel that ministers take on board their concerns is a question that could be debated until the cows come home. Many have expressed the view that, for all the rhetoric, nothing ever changes a particular minister's viewpoint or intention on a particular matter.

People welcome the community cabinet meetings because they were and are seen as bringing with them a basket of goodies to benefit the communities. It was my belief that these meetings were to do exactly what this parliamentary sitting is supposed to do. I would have thought that if people need or want to get close to a minister and have their concerns heard, the community cabinet meetings provide access far more efficiently and cost-effectively than this road show, which primarily allows the public to sit and watch and, I would assume, as happens here in Brisbane, to be thrown out if they dare to speak out from the gallery. How many extra community consultative meetings could be held throughout Queensland in much smaller communities with the money that is to be spent on the parliamentary sitting in Townsville?

The relocating of 89 members, ministerial, Hansard and various other staff members and equipment is, I guess, a logistical feat and one, if achieved successfully, to be marvelled at. Because of this, so many questions rush forward to be asked. How many staff is the Premier taking? How many staff is each minister including in their entourage? How much equipment will be transported or hired for the use of all other members? It is almost impossible to obtain a real cost of this parliamentary sitting. So much of the cost is attributed in various ways. As an example, the added cost of travel to Townsville will probably be relegated to a member's travel entitlements. Many would see this as reasonable, but it is in fact an added cost of holding this parliamentary sitting in Townsville. Therefore, it should be seen as part of the overall cost. This is money the people of Queensland are being asked to give.

The budget estimates show a figure of \$500,000 as the additional cost of holding the three-day sitting in Townsville. I find the cost expressed in the estimates to be a very difficult one to believe. There must have been a world-winning performance of juggling the figures. What about the cost of accommodating all 89 members when at present many members in the Brisbane area go home at

night? Then there are the costs of accommodation for Hansard and the ministerial staff, hiring of equipment, freight of that equipment and insurance to cover the entire lot, let alone the cost of insurance for the transport of the Legislative Council furniture. The cost of flights alone will be substantial as almost all members of this House will have to be flown when at present the vast majority reside in the south-east corner and therefore drive. How much of the true cost associated with this Townsville sitting will be hidden under the guise of other departments' departmental expenses?

Many people in Townsville will enjoy the money this sitting will bring into the town, and the government will bask in the media reports, the front pages and the feel-good atmosphere. But what of the people who suffer daily to take a breath, who live in fear that each day may be their last? How many of these people could benefit from this publicity-seeking Premier's ever continuing desire to find a new stage on which to perform? It has been stated that \$500,000 would support the employment of a specialist doctor and the necessary assistance in a major hospital for a year. How many people would that benefit? How many dental procedures could be performed? How much shorter could our waiting lists become? There are so many issues requiring our attention, but we are quite happy to spend this extra money holding a parliamentary sitting outside of this House.

At best, this Townsville sitting will be a staged performance if MPs cannot be in constant contact with their researchers, electorate staff or office equipment. Many issues which need to be brought up urgently arise unexpectedly. Without constant access to equipment and staff, this will be difficult. The *Notice Paper* outlining the order of the bills to be debated can often change on the morning of the day in question. Access to researchers, printers and so on is essential to allow all of us to perform the job we are there to do; that is, question, analyse and, if need be, fight the government's legislation. The Beattie government will ensure that it performs well and that its Labor members have adequate resources and knowledge of the tactics to be used to ensure they perform well. I ask that all members of parliament have equal opportunity to access equipment and to keep in contact with their offices. Since coming into this parliament I have become cynical about what is fair.

The final example of the excess involved with this concept is the proposal that the antique furniture of the Legislative Council be freighted to Townsville for the sitting. The insurance, freight and other costs to move this valuable furniture to and from the venue are just some of the expenses which are totally unnecessary. It will look good, no doubt. What is wrong with using the chairs, tables and other miscellaneous furniture located in the venue and setting it up in the layout required? Taking historical antique furniture from the Legislative Council is subjecting it to damage which threatens this particular example of Queensland history.

Parliament House MPs' living quarters, staff and meals facilities, already established in Brisbane to ensure minimal cost to the people during a parliamentary sitting, will sit idle while 89 MPs and their entourages travel to Townsville at the people's expense. Is Townsville a trip of good value? Not in many people's books. Quite frankly, I see a lot of people needing hip replacements, heart operations or dental procedures left a little longer on their respective waiting lists. I see the need for urgent attention to solve the insurance fiasco and to help to assist industry to supply the jobs, jobs, jobs this government continues to spruik about not being given. Action to address essential shortages is needed—not words, and especially not this media opportunity and show pony stunt.

In saying all of that, now that the money has been committed I truly hope that this exercise is a success and that every member puts their best efforts into ensuring that it is. I also hope that the people of north Queensland feel part of the process of this government.
