



Speech by
Mike Horan

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Hansard Wednesday, 19 May 2004

STANDING ORDER 70(II)

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (5.52 p.m.): The member for Ipswich has let sitting beside the illustrious member for Stafford go to her head. What a patronising and pathetic contribution we saw tonight with all of her esoteric lecturing of us about the meaning of words and so forth. This debate is far more important than some silly little stunt by the member for Ipswich. This debate goes to the heart of this parliament. This debate goes to the most important stage of the whole parliamentary process—that is, question time when ministers must stand on their feet under the glare of the media, the full House and the gallery and answer questions without notice.

If there is one thing that makes this parliament accountable and keeps the Westminster system going, it is question time. Ministers are asked a question and are not supposed to know what is coming. They have to think on their feet. However, we see all of the ministers opposite furrow through their notes to give some sort of response that has been printed out by their office. Parliament—and the true parliament—will work when ministers can stand on their feet and answer a question without notice from the opposition about a subject off the top of their head.

One reason this debate is so important tonight is that, for historical, political and electoral reasons, we have a parliament that has a massive majority for the second time in a row. That majority is coupled with the fact that the official opposition of the National Party has 15 members, then there are five Liberals, five Independents and then the one One Nation member. So the whole of question time is fragmented, disrupted and split up. Therefore, the traditional questioning that might follow from one question after another after another to test the mettle of the ministers, to test their knowledge and accountability is fragmented and split up by the very numbers in here. As I said, it is a historical fact and the result of an election win by the Labor Party and what is happening on our side of politics. That makes it all the more important that the questions that are asked in this parliament are answered properly by the ministers who sit opposite.

We have seen the arrogance of this Beattie Labor government with its massive majority, especially this time around, where it treats this place like a dirty doormat and treats the principles of democracy like a dirty doormat. In particular, this government takes FOI matters into the cabinet process by the truckload and treats this parliament like a dirty doormat by not answering questions. The member for Rockhampton had no intention of answering any questions yesterday or any other day. He had his little green slip of paper and he was going to tell the goat story come hell or high water, because that was the ruse he was going to use to get out of answering awkward questions.

As an example of the arrogance, in this parliament today we saw the Minister for Health stand up and try to shut down the democratic process of a member of parliament standing up for the people of his electorate—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I think this is getting away from the motion.

Mr HORAN:—and speak without fear or favour about the electorate.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I think this is getting away from the motion. That was a point of privilege this morning. It was not an answer to a question.

Mr HORAN: I know it was not, but it is an example of the arrogance that has crept in.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr HORAN: That is why it is important.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! We will stick to the motion.

Mr HORAN: That is why it is important. He refuses to answer in this parliament.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Toowoomba South will stick to the motion. We are not going to go through the whole parliamentary process.

Mr HORAN: I hear what you are saying, Mr Speaker, but it was an example of the arrogance—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! No.

Mr HORAN: I used FOI as an example of the arrogance. I get back to the issue of questions. If ministers do not answer the questions, the taxpayers are not getting value for money. These ministers fly to this place at taxpayers' expense, and the only way we can keep them accountable is questions without notice. There are only four or five questions that are available to us in each session of question time and then they go and dodge them. What is wrong with ensuring that public confidence and taxpayers feeling that their money is being spent in an accountable way is adhered to by ensuring that our standing orders make the answer to the question directly relevant so that there is no problem either for you, Mr Speaker, or for us or those who witness parliament and make judgment on it about whether or not ministers are undertaking their responsibility and answering the questions that they are supposed to answer? Mr Speaker, yesterday when you provided a lecture to us all about behaviour in this place, we saw the immediate bellicose bullfrog from Bulimba carry on with an interjection, and that is how this government treats this place. If we cannot get people to—

Time expired.