



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; ESTIMATES C

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (4.43 pm): Before I begin the substantive part of my speech, I place on the public record my appreciation and thanks to the staff of the departments of industrial relations, training and vocational education, as well as the staff and advisers from the department of education and the department of the arts.

The estimates process is a vitally important one. It gives members the opportunity to go through the Appropriation Bill with a fine-tooth comb. Without the staff and advisers this process would not be possible. I thank them for their assistance.

With regard to the process, as I mentioned last year there are some problems with the way in which ministers answer questions. While the opposition is happy to hear background information during the first part of an answer, it is unacceptable for a minister to simply not answer a question and use it as an opportunity to deliver a diatribe about a program that may have some vague relevance to the question. Many times during the process I asked a question and the minister would go off on a three-minute tangent, then loosely link it back at the last moment. In many cases, this prompted the question being asked again or reworded. This wastes the committee's valuable time. It has only one day to get through a great deal of material. By the time government members have put questions on a golf tee for the minister to hit for miles, actual scrutiny of the department occurs for only a short period of time—time that cannot afford to be wasted. In fact, in the words of the Labor Party's leader in the Senate just a couple of nights ago, everyone knows the dorothy dixer, that is—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I remind the honourable member of relevance. He should address the matter before the House.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Everyone knows that the dorothy dixer—that is, the government asking the government a question—is not a measure of accountability; it is a farce. I do not often agree with Labor senators, but I could not agree more with Senator Evans on this point.

There are specific parts of the process that I would like to highlight. I will first refer to the time that was spent dealing with the Department of Industrial Relations. I was surprised and disappointed that the Minister for Industrial Relations could not answer a very simple question about the shared service provider Corporate Solutions Queensland. As I have stated in the statement of reservations, the purpose of this question was to give the committee an opportunity to find out if this particular regime was or was not working and if the new regime was more efficient than its existing counterpart. I cannot understand how a minister whose director-general is in charge of the shared service provider cannot answer a question and why he would clearly try to skirt the issue. To make matters worse, he even said that he was not ducking the issue but that it was a matter for the Treasurer to give a whole-of-government figure. The fact that these figures were unavailable and that the minister decided to deny the opportunity for scrutiny is not in the spirit or intended ambit of the estimates process. As I have said—and I will say it again—I was disappointed at the unprofessional and unacceptable answer to this question.

I was also disappointed by the response of the minister with regard to safety switches in schools. His view and the view of the government is letting down the children of Queensland. While there is some merit in spending half a million dollars on advertising the importance of safety switches in homes, there is a great need to spend some of that advertising money on protecting our teachers and children by putting safety switches into every classroom in Queensland.

I was similarly disappointed by the response from the former education minister with regard to asbestos dust testing. As it has turned out, the former education minister has misled the House on two occasions with regard to this issue. The bottom line is that the children of Queensland are not being treated fairly by this government. Its policies on safety in classrooms, including a lazy approach to asbestos testing, asbestos removal and implementation of safety switches, highlight its poor approach.

Again, I am pleased to have had the opportunity to participate in the estimates process. I thank all of the parliamentary and departmental staff who were involved. I am also honoured to have served on the committee as deputy chair. It was a great learning experience that I thank the committee for bestowing on me. I hope that next year ministers will be more willing to answer questions properly and fully. I look forward to some improvements in the policy areas that I have highlighted.