



Speech by

Mike Horan

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Hansard Tuesday, 28 February 2006

MEMBERS' ETHICS AND PARLIAMENTARY PRIVILEGES COMMITTEE, MEMBERS' ENTITLEMENTS

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (3.16 pm): I support this motion for referral of this matter to the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee. I declare to the parliament that I am a member of that committee, so I will not be passing any judgement today on the issues that are being referred to the committee. I have spoken to the Clerk of the Parliament, who has said that it is proper and right that I do speak today on this issue. There are two parts to this. Firstly, there is the political issue and, secondly, there is the referral to the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee.

On the political side of this issue, there are many of us in this House who know Robert Poole, and Robert Poole has many personal friends in this House on both sides. Many of us in this House know of the personal circumstances that he faces, and it is difficult with his wife living overseas and having two children, one of whom has had an illness. The issue is that the Premier gave him approval for the three months that he needed to spend with his family for whatever particular reasons. The reason that this has now become a political issue and is being debated in the parliament today is that members of the Labor Party went to the Premier and got him to overturn that particular decision. That is why this issue was brought into the parliament. That is why the Premier did the big backflip—because of the political pressure that he is under from members of his own party. That is why we have ended up with this motion in the parliament to refer this matter to the MEPPC and are debating it when people like the acting opposition leader have said that there could have been a simple referral through the Speaker.

As I said at the outset, I will not pass judgement because I believe that the MEPPC is made up of a good balance of people from different sides of the House and will look at this matter in the scope of their experience and so forth. But I do make the comment that the big judge of members of parliament is the electorate. Along the way, permission for issues such as absence from parliament comes from the leader—whether it is the Premier or the opposition leader. In the case of the Independents, they make their own particular decisions. All of us, as the member for Rockhampton said, stand to be judged every three years when it comes to election time. I have great regrets that I did not go to the World Cup in 1991 to see my son play for Australia. I have great regrets that I did not do it in 1995. But in 1999 I went over just for one weekend to see him in the final. I nearly killed myself flying over and back in four days. We all have regrets about things that we have not done because of our parliamentary duties and we have stayed here. It is when family members are away or people are suffering a particular problem or illness that they get permission and that they travel overseas with that permission.

Hardly anyone in this parliament would not work somewhere between 70 and 100 hours per week. They are the sorts of issues that will need to be considered by the committee. Many people in this parliament have previous business interests, farms or some talent that involves them as a director or something like that but still do their 70, 80, 90 or 100 hours per week. Many people in this parliament go to university and undertake other courses after hours but still put in the hours. Hopefully, they will be elected; the people will make the judgement. Others are involved with shares and property and other things. Other people have hobbies that might take particular amounts of time. I say good luck to them if they have the

time to spend on a particular hobby to keep themselves sane and to be able to serve their time in this parliament.

At the end of the day we are judged by the people in our electorates. There will be members here—as I have said, a shadow minister, a minister, an opposition leader, a deputy opposition leader, a committee member or a committee chair—who would find that between their electorate duties and other duties they would easily work up to 100 hours a week. People might ask how. It is not hard when we start with the media at six in the morning and finish with a function that goes til 10 at night. It is not hard when we spend most of Saturday and Sunday working. It is not hard when we sit up Sunday night preparing briefs for cabinet or shadow cabinet and doing all the research that has to be done.

It is going to be very important for the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee, firstly, to keep faith with the public—to put in place a system that the public sees is fair; this has been brought to the parliament and we on this side are supporting it as well—and, secondly, to provide a system of guidelines and rules that does take account of the fact that members of parliament work extremely long hours and they do have family commitments which are important. As well as that, we want to have people in this parliament who are talented, who do have some abilities and who come from a wide cross-section of previous occupations and are able to use those talents and their leadership skills well in this community.