



Speech by
Gary Fenlon

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

Hansard Wednesday, 8 August 2007

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL AND APPROPRIATION BILL:
ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G (REPORT NO. 1)**

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (10.31 pm): I rise to speak in this debate on the report of Estimates Committee G and to take up one of the key elements of the budget in relation to community engagement. I must say that this is a great concept. In fact, I tend to replicate it in my electorate office. One of my electorate officers is focused specifically on this issue of community engagement in terms of being able to relate to various sectors of the community on behalf of the government and on behalf of the parliament in general. It is an important factor, especially in relation to the issue of education and the education of young people who come through this place.

I think one of the most important things that I do in my job in terms of being on the ground in my electorate is I go out of my way to come to the parliament when every group of year 7s from my electorate comes through the House. Wherever possible I also go out of my way to make an effort to get to the classroom of every year 7 student in my electorate to speak to them. I think there are a number of very important aspects to that. I think the students need to see that members of parliament are real people and that we are accessible. I point out to the kids that in a lot of other countries in the world it is very hard for people to have direct contact with their elected member and it is very hard to get access to them. I think we are very fortunate in Queensland in terms of being able to have such ready access to members of parliament compared to the situation in the rest of the world.

The other topic that I ensure that I refer to when speaking to the kids in the schools in my electorate is the separation of powers. I think that is an issue that is certainly underplayed broadly in our community. If the kids come through this place and understand the separation of powers, then they really understand the role of the parliament. In fact, I think it is impossible to come near this place, to see this place and to learn about this place without understanding the concept of the separation of powers. In terms of community engagement, I think that education on the separation of powers should be a very important aspect.

I also think it is very important to focus on the facilities in our electorate offices. Over the years we have seen the transition in various offices from one staff member through to two staff members. A lot of offices simply have not caught up with that extra staff. Indeed, I take the mute interjection from the member for Gregory who has indicated that he has three staff members. I think we have had some real occupational health and safety issues in terms of having pretty cramped conditions in our offices. I am lucky enough to be getting an extension to my office, which will alleviate the occupational health and safety conditions of people almost sitting on top of each other. I think we need to be vigilant to make sure that our electorate officers, who are such a valuable front line out there in our electorates, enjoy reasonable conditions in our electorate offices to be able to comfortably deliver the great service that they all do.

The other important feature that has happened in my time here is the safety measures put in across level 7 and level 5. When I first came here I had a little scurrying baby out on the verandas. It was terrifying to see that kids could disappear, especially under the Parliamentary Annexe verandas. We have since had those verandas enclosed with glass. It was incredibly dangerous. I am also pleased to see the additions

put on level 7 in the barbecue area. I can recall holding a barbecue here some years ago where we all had to sit down for a long time after we discovered that one of the kids had climbed up on to the edge of the balcony. We all had to sit down and take a deep breath, because it was pretty scary to think of the consequences of that. So anything that we can do to ensure the safety around our verandas, especially on level 7, I think is a very good move. We have to be vigilant that those areas are well maintained for those safety reasons.