



Speech by
Jeff Seeney

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Hansard Wednesday, 8 August 2007

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL AND APPROPRIATION BILL: ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.35 am): I am pleased to be able to make a contribution to the consideration of the report of Estimates Committee A. At the outset, I congratulate all of the people who participated in estimates this year. In the run-up to estimates I did make some public comments about what needed to happen at estimates committees to make it a worthwhile process. As I said in those comments—and I remain of the position—estimates committees can be a valuable process or a waste of time depending on the way they are conducted and depending on the attitude of both the chairmen of the committees and the ministers involved.

I am happy to put on the record in this parliament that I think this year we saw a general acceptance of the spirit of estimates and much improved conduct of the committees. I am referring generally to all of the estimates committees. I certainly would not suggest that it was a perfect situation. Some ministers embraced the spirit of estimates a lot more wholeheartedly than others did. I do not think we saw a misuse of the process to quite the same extent as we have seen in the past. I do not want to be too fulsome with my praise because I know that there are some ministers—and I will not point them out, but some are here in the House now—who did not follow the example that was set by others and did not embrace the opportunity at estimates. I will be kind enough to say that that is due to their inexperience. I hope as they become more experienced they will participate in the estimates process in the way that I think produces the best outcome.

In relation to the estimates committee hearing that the Premier and I participated in, I congratulate the Premier on the way that he participated in the hearing. It was a very useful exchange of information. It was a very robust exchange at times but it was conducted in the right spirit. If we can build on that example this year then I think the estimates committee process can be valuable.

I now turn to particular issues that were addressed in our committee hearing. The Premier went through them in his contribution to the debate on the consideration of this report. He responded to all of the issues that I raised in the statement of reservations that I lodged with the committee following the hearing. We were certainly concerned about the reporting of the expenditure on contractors. We still are concerned about that. I am not satisfied with the explanation that the Premier has given. There is still no clear reporting of the expenditure of Queenslanders' money on contractors. The way that is reported is quite different to the way expenditure on consultants is reported, for example. That was the comparison that I drew.

With regard to the Integrity Commissioner, the Premier gave his response and I still do not accept his response regarding the Integrity Commissioner. If the Integrity Commissioner is going to be meaningful and credible, then we all need to have some confidence in it and we all need to understand and appreciate the rulings that are made and the precedents that those rulings set, and I remain of that view. With regard to the staffing issues, as the Premier has indicated, those concerns that we raised have resolved themselves in the fullness of time.

The ZeroGen issue was an interesting consideration for the committee. I have not yet been able to avail myself of the briefing that the Premier offered, but I thank him for that because I think it is important for Queensland's future that there is something of a bipartisan involvement in major issues like clean coal technology. They are issues that certainly transcend any single term of government and they are issues that we all have an interest in and support for. Irrespective of who sits on either side of this parliament, there needs to be that combined involvement in those issues.

With regard to the final issue that the Premier mentioned in relation to the trade reporting issue, I think that reinforces the points that were made by the Auditor-General in the report that he tabled in this parliament yesterday, and that was quite a damning report of the whole budget process with regard to the performance indicators that are used in the MPSs. It is a challenge for the government to embrace the recommendations and the comments of the Auditor-General. I note that here in the parliament this morning the Treasurer was very loath to do that and the comments that the Treasurer made certainly do not provide anyone with any encouragement that the government is going to take notice of the Auditor-General. The Auditor-General is an independent officer and I think that he has fulfilled his role well in identifying, as he has done in this report, the deficiencies in the government's reporting system and the extent to which those MPSs are a farce. It is a challenge for the government to address that issue.