



Speech by

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Hansard Wednesday, 8 August 2007

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

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (12.43 pm): It is my pleasure to rise to speak to the report of Estimates Committee B having been a member of that committee. I thank my fellow committee members and the member for Cleveland, a new member, for his chairing of it. I thought that the whole day proceeded in a pleasant manner. That is so for both government members and opposition members.

I want to make some general observations. Firstly, I thank the secretariat—Deborah Jeffrey, Tina Christy and Marilyn Freeman. I note my concern about the decline in time allocated to health. Last year it was three hours and 35 minutes, the year before it was four hours and 10 minutes and this year it was only three hours. This concerns me given that this portfolio is such a major part of the Queensland state budget—some \$7 billion this year out of a \$30 billion budget. I think it really deserves more time for consideration.

I am not an interjector per se and not someone constantly seeking more information on answers but if I ask for clarification, because of the nature of the estimates process, that can easily be interpreted as an interjection for interjection sake and the clock starts again. That means that I do not have time to explore another issue when I have lots of carefully prepared questions. I think that is something that we should look at. Not everyone is interjecting and trying to score a point. Sometimes we want the minister to expand a bit further. Unfortunately that will often be misinterpreted as deliberately being difficult.

I also want to make reference to something that I have noticed has crept into estimates. I refer to what is contained in the Members' Information Manual under section 4.8—'Scope and admissibility of questions'. Under 4.8.4 it says—

Wide latitude is generally allowed as it can be expected that there will be broad discussion ranging from items of detail to broad policy. The chairperson will usually leave it to the minister or the Speaker to object to the scope of the questioning.

I have to acknowledge that the Minister for Health did not say that he did not want to answer any questions apart from one that I asked about the Medical Board. There was a time when he said, 'These are budget estimates, you know.' I think that is at odds with the Members' Information Manual which says, 'Wide latitude is generally allowed.' I do not think the definition is that we are only allowed to ask about what is in the MPS and what is in the budget. I think that has been misinterpreted over time. Clearly, that rule says, 'Wide latitude is generally allowed.' If the government wishes to change that then we should debate that at another time. Clearly, that is something that we should be looking at. Ministers seem to be saying at times, 'I do not want to answer that because it is not specifically in the budget.'

There are specific concerns I had in terms of the answers to questions with regard to this portfolio. In terms of capital works it was clearly identified that there had been a lack of proper and robust planning. That was acknowledged by the minister. That has been identified in an Auditor-General's report. We now have three sections of the health department that have been mentioned by the Auditor-General as being of concern. They include a performance management system audit of capital works and workforce planning. Yesterday's Auditor-General's report speaks about the output performance measures as measured in the

MPS. I am now in my fourth year. A lot of the measures put in the MPS are clearly things that the department puts in the MPS for the sake of putting things in the MPS. This has been identified by the Auditor-General. They are not there for any other purpose. They are just there to fill up some space. They do not clarify any information about the budget itself and are just there because they have to put something in. Clearly, the Auditor-General has identified that as a problem. That is something that I hope the minister will look to rectify.

It is of concern to me that in three major areas—the ones that I have mentioned—the health department has been found wanting by the Auditor-General over the last year. I also want to note that what the minister had to say about capital works was not quite what the Auditor-General had to say. I have concerns about the performance budget framework. The minister talks about improving health funding but he would not tell us how the funds would be appropriated on a facility level.

I have concerns about elective surgery. I have had to ask for details about outsourcing to private hospitals because he only gave me information about the Surgery Connect program. Similarly, I asked about the Specialist Outpatient Review Committee which revealed that there are hidden waiting lists. They are the things that I asked about at the estimates hearing and I said that elective surgery waiting lists were being manipulated.