



Speech by

Karen Struthers

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

Hansard Wednesday, 8 August 2007

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

Ms STRUTHERS (Algester—ALP) (10.12 pm): The parliament is not simply about the members of the parliament. There is a very loyal and hardworking range of parliamentary staff who make the Parliament of Queensland successful, accountable and smooth running. As members we are extremely well supported in our work. In supporting the deliberations of Estimates Committee G, I firstly pay tribute to the staff of the Queensland parliament—Library and research staff, committee staff, catering staff, Table Office staff, Hansard staff, the Office of the Clerk, human resources staff, finance staff, information technology staff and many others. As members we receive high-quality research briefs from library staff. Parliamentary committee staff operate with a great deal of integrity and intellect. All in all staff are very professional and very helpful.

I also tonight want to pay tribute to the Speaker of the House. He has taken many new initiatives since taking up the role as Speaker and I want to comment on a couple of those in my speech tonight. I particularly want to note that he has established a dedicated Community Engagement Division within the parliament. It is so important that the Queensland parliament is a true parliament for the people. This new division will no doubt strengthen the capacity of this parliament to reach out and involve the community more in its activities. I know that the Community Engagement Division will particularly focus on youth, Indigenous people and people in regional Queensland. I know from my own involvement in educational programs within the parliament that staff like Graeme Kinnear and Roylene Mills and others work with a great deal of dedication to better inform young people particularly and recently Indigenous people about the workings of the parliament and giving them encouragement to get more involved in the parliament.

Mr Speaker also deserves recognition for the very historic Indigenous ceremony organised on the Speaker's Green to mark the 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum improving the status of Indigenous Australians. It was historic and, I would say, very moving to be part of this ceremony. It was great to see so many members of parliament and parliamentary staff participate actively in that ceremony. To be on the Speaker's Green and under that smoke as part of the smoking ceremony and to see so many Indigenous people very proud of their culture and proud to let us know about it and to be part of that ceremony was certainly a very significant milestone in the life of the Queensland parliament. I know that in many ways it was seen more as a symbolic exercise—a message to Indigenous people—that this is their place as much as ours and that we do want to see more active participation in the parliament.

I know also that Mr Speaker has given full consideration to recommendations of the LCARC report of a few years ago talking about and recommending changes to increase the participation of Indigenous people in the parliament. I guess some of it has been facilitated by that report but he has certainly put his own stamp on some of these initiatives. In my view it is a disgrace that we have only had one Indigenous person in this parliament. This parliament does not reflect the diversity of the community.

We are getting more women in parliament which is a great thing. We now number over 30 per cent. But for many years this parliament has not reflected the diversity, and it still does not. I think members would agree with me on that. To be a true people's House this parliament does need to reflect the full range

of people who make up our community. The original custodians of this land are a very important and significant group within our community who ought to have representation in this parliament. I share the Speaker's interest in enhancing the participation of Indigenous people. I am working actively in my own way to work with Indigenous people to better educate them about the political process and the parliamentary process. I would hope that in my lifetime in the Queensland parliament we do see Indigenous people elected.

In general, the parliament runs very well. It is a great place to work. It is a great privilege to be a member of parliament. Our electorate offices and our electorate staff are also well supported. I commend the members of Estimates Committee G for their deliberations, including the chair, the member for Waterford. He is a capable member with a big future in this House. I am sure members would agree with me on that. I commend the report of Estimates Committee G to the House.