



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (10.37 pm): I would like to start by commending the staff of Parliament House who have looked after us so well over the past 12 months and also in my case over the past almost 18 years. I also commend my electorate staff who have always done a very professional job in assisting me to properly service the people of the Southern Downs electorate.

I would like to make comment about a couple of areas. I know other members have mentioned during the course of their contributions this evening the issue of the lifts of Parliament House. This is one of those perennials—the hoary old chestnut that seems to come up every year in this place. I am not sure there is an easy answer to the problem. Some people say that it costs too much and, therefore, we cannot do it. The member for Beaudesert has probably as good an understanding of this issue and the history of it as anyone else. It was a planning oversight some 25 years ago and it needs to be addressed.

Some people say that there is one way of fixing this issue and that is for members to exercise literally and to walk between floors a bit more. That might have some application for three, four or five floors but sometimes members have to travel eight, 10 or 12 floors. Therefore, that is not a really practical solution. I say that, regardless of what people might say, there is a real loss of capacity. In this parliament some efficiencies have been lost by not actually having this issue addressed. One day we are going to have to bite the bullet in regard to addressing it.

I would also like to say that recently I have been impressed to read that the library is going to be reopened on a trial basis during parliamentary sitting hours until about 8.30 at night. I believe that is a good move. I was not very happy when a number of years ago the library was closed during parliamentary sitting hours and scaled back to five o'clock in the afternoon. Some members of parliament like to be able to go down to the library and ask the professional researchers in the library whether they can lay their hands on a document and do some research for them so that they can have it with them. Many of us would consider ourselves to be reasonably computer and IT savvy. However, it does not matter how savvy you are, when you are dealing with professional researchers who have access to the latest research databases and other tools, they can lay their hands on gear much more quickly than we can. I encourage members of parliament to make sure that that system works. The parliament should have such a system if it hopes to operate properly in a Westminster environment. That service should be available for members of parliament generally when the parliament sits because one never knows when one might need documents found or research undertaken.

I would like to touch on something that has concerned me for a very long period, which is the way that so-called privileges of members of parliament are stereotyped and sometimes used against us. Many people do not realise that we give up certain things when we come into this place. For many of us, this is a home away from home. A lot of us would like to be able to wake up with our families each morning. We would like to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner with our families. However, that is not always possible. Therefore, a system has evolved to provide us with an opportunity to enjoy certain home-away-from-home opportunities.

Nothing appals me more than reading in the media that we are availing ourselves of amazing a la carte three-course meals at \$10 a head, or whatever the case may be, as though we are supping off the public largesse. Members of the media themselves think nothing of availing themselves of the cost-price meals at the parliamentary cafeteria. Frankly, we have cost-price meals because we have to eat somewhere. We are here and it is a part of work that we actually do. Throughout Queensland or Australia any number of institutions offer their staff cost-price meals. What is wrong with that? If I were at home, I would be able to eat breakfast for less than I can have it here. I would be able to eat lunch and dinner for less than I can have it here. It is not that I do not necessarily enjoy the company, but I would like to enjoy the company of my family.

When people write such critiques about us, they need to consider that a cheap shot is a cheap shot and it is only a cheap shot. It does them no service and it does the institution no service. Sometimes it might be better for them to write something in praise of the institution, explaining what it is all about, rather than herding with the lowest common denominator and seeking to accentuate a perception that is based on some sort of false premise.

I ask the Speaker not to go with the herd. I ask him to ensure that we are able to get the cost-price meals, because it is important that we do so. We pay more in the Stranger's Dining Room and that is fine. However, in the other situation we get cost-price meals for a reason.