



Speech by

**Mike Horan**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

Hansard Wednesday, 8 August 2007

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

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—NPA) (9.56 pm): It was quite unusual for this section of estimates to be in Estimates Committee G. It has normally been in the committee which questions the Premier and Deputy Premier. I understand there was a change this year because the Speaker was away at a particularly important conference. It gave us, rather than the leadership, the opportunity to be able to bring up some very important issues regarding the parliament.

In my earlier contribution on this same estimates committee I thanked our chairman, Evan Moorhead, for the very able way in which he conducted our committee. I also thanked Julie Copley and the staff. At this particular time I would also thank the Speaker's staff and Neil Laurie and his staff. We have come to respect Neil for the very professional way he and his team provides a service here. I would like to thank him for what he does for everybody in a very even-handed way.

I do not want to go overboard but I also think the Speaker is a breath of fresh air in the parliament—not you, Mr Deputy Speaker, even though you are a good Deputy Speaker. We find him to be very fair and he operates under the true principles of the Speaker in a Westminster democracy. I think that should be said. There are moments when we may not fully agree, but we have to cop some discipline on this side of the House sometimes.

Our chairman went through a number of issues that were brought up. All of us on the committee appreciate whatever support can be provided to our electorate office staff. There was a nasty incident in the office of one of our members, and as a consequence security audits have taken place. Electorate office staff very often undertake the vast bulk of the work because, depending upon the member's position, he or she can be away a lot. Ministers, shadow ministers, opposition leaders or the chairman of committees can be away for long periods of time and it is the electorate office staff who carry the brunt of just about everything. I think it is important that they are secure where they are and that their working conditions are pleasant, reasonable and modern.

When it comes to salaries, I can remember when we got into government and I suddenly had ministerial staff and I was quite amazed at the pay rates that were available for ministerial officers compared to what the pay rates were for the electorate officers. I thought our electorate officers were not paid well enough compared to what ministerial staff got. Electorate officers have to handle trauma and drama. As I am sure everybody here has experienced, we have had people in our offices in absolute tragic circumstances—weeping and upset with all sorts of difficult problems and issues—and the electorate staff have to handle that. Whatever can be provided in support and training I would commend. I know the Speaker has that in mind.

We touched on the hoary old chestnut of the lifts. One day someone will come down here and conk out because they have run down seven or 10 flights of stairs. It is an issue that needs to be addressed. It can probably be managed better. The PA system recordings could be played each and every time there is a division. We now have some 40,000 to 70,000 people who visit this parliament, which is great. For

example, it was Science in Parliament Day today and there were people going up and down and all over the place. Some of them have no idea as it is their first time in the parliament. They do not know what it means when the bells ring and people rush everywhere. There needs to be an explanation over the PA system.

On the issue of water, there is a huge roof area here and under the formula of one litre of water per millimetre of rain per square metre of roof there is enormous potential to catch a lot of rain off the roof of these premises. I know it is difficult to put water tanks in an historical precinct that was not designed to have water tanks. There is one big tank but obviously there is potential to have more than that. This place, like all the houses in south-east Queensland that are maximising the potential for water storage, should be setting an example.

We mentioned during the hearings that there is a lot of casual staff and backpackers employed in the catering section of this premises and some of them have difficulty speaking English. This place is almost home to a lot of people here. Some people are here 30 weeks of the year because of their positions. There needs to be catering staff who recognise them and know them so that the place does feel to some extent like home.