



Speech by

Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Wednesday, 8 August 2007

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

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (12.52 pm): In speaking to the report of Estimates Committee B, I acknowledge members, both Labor and conservative, and the parliamentary staff who acted in a professional and polite manner. They also allowed the process to proceed smoothly. Many staff, both in the police and corrective services department and the coalition offices, work long hours to prepare for the hearings, and I want to thank those staff for their diligence and their hard work. However, my thanks and acknowledgements are not an endorsement of the estimates process that this government has cleverly designed to give the impression of accountability. In reality, Queensland's estimates process is at best a superficial examination of the working of the police and corrective services department and at worst the easiest way a dictatorial and all-powerful political party in a unicameral parliament can create the public illusion of ministerial accountability and parliamentary responsibility.

As the shadow minister I was only able to ask of the minister—not of her senior departmental officers, as is the case in federal parliament—15 questions of the corrective services department, a department with a budget of about \$0.5 billion, and 17 questions of the police department, which is a department with a budget of over \$1.4 billion. In total, that means that 32 questions were asked by the opposition to examine the government's accountability and ability to competently, efficiently and transparently spend approximately \$2 billion of taxpayers' money. If you average that out, that is about \$625,000 per question. This for me is compelling evidence that all Queenslanders should at least be given the choice of whether an upper house capable of rigorously examining and holding the government of the day to account should be re-formed.

I think it is appropriate, as the shadow police and corrective services minister, that I publicly send my condolences and heartfelt sympathy to the family and friends of Constable Brett Irwin, who was recently shot serving the people of Queensland. Brett died a hero doing the job he loved. It was a privilege to represent the coalition at his funeral. The size of the loss of Brett's passing hit home when I saw the look and the tears on the faces of his mum, Mrs Irwin—a lady who has endured incredible loss, not only of Brett but of other family members—his partner and members of Squad 317, who carried his coffin. I congratulate the 3,000 or more police officers who were able to pay their respects in person. I also congratulate the people of Brisbane who lined the streets and silently paid their respects. I remember standing beside Campbell Newman on the steps of the church and he remarked to me that he had never seen anything like this in his whole life.

Up until two days ago our law enforcement officers were the worst paid officers in the country. It was only a united stand by a determined Queensland Police Union executive, its members, a very smart public awareness campaign and community anger that forced this government to increase police salaries. Unfortunately, once again this government has been forced to play catch-up and do the right thing.

In relation to the Queensland Police Union advertising, I think that they are inspired ads. They are realistic messages and I ask the minister to give a commitment to pay for those ads—that is, the cost of running those ads and producing those ads. I do not think that the rank and file of the Queensland Police

Union should have to pay for those ads. They are valuable community, education, promotional and recruiting tools. I commend the police minister for doing the right thing in this instance and offer her the challenge to fix the other significant problems which have befallen our Police Service. We have the problem of mandatory sentencing for people who are found guilty of seriously assaulting police. We have the problem of covert—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Moorhead): Member for Burnett, I ask you to return to the subject of the debate.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for that direction. The subject of the debate is of course the issues that I spoke to the police minister about in the estimates committee. I spoke to her about, for example, a police helicopter. I questioned the police minister at length about a police helicopter, radio black spots and tasers. It is time to stop the trial of tasers and give the order for a full operational rollout of these life-saving 21st century law enforcement tools. They have proved their worth time and time again around the world and in Australia. My message to the minister is this: in parliament today she proved comprehensively the case for tasers. They will save lives. Now spend the money and issue tasers to all front-line police. This will save lives—both police lives and the lives of the public. The only reason I can logically think of as to why this government will not do this is that this government with \$53 billion of borrowings is strapped for cash and is going broke. That is why we do not have a police helicopter. That is why—

Time expired.