



Speech by

Lawrence Springborg

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

Hansard Thursday, 6 August 2009

APPROPRIATION BILLS: ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—LNP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (11.37 am): At the outset I commend the member for Bundamba for being a very able chairman of Estimates Committee E and for handling the deliberations, discussions and investigations of the committee in a very fair and open way—during the committee's deliberations and during the taking of evidence. The meetings were run extremely quickly. They were run without contention and the chair was able to facilitate a free flow of investigation by the committee during its hearing.

I was certainly disappointed in the contribution by the new Attorney-General, the person who sees himself as becoming ultimately the Premier in Queensland, probably sooner rather than later in the best traditions of Steven Bradbury—basically waiting for the 16 or 17 ahead of him to fall over so he can catapult into the chair in short fashion. I contrast his lack of openness with the performance of his two colleagues who were also before the committee for questioning that day—the honourable member for Mount Coot-tha and the Minister for Primary Industries. When they were asked for information that they did not have at their fingertips, they were very open and were prepared to say that they would provide that information to the committee in the way the committee member had requested it. By contrast, the Attorney-General obfuscated and was not prepared to be fulsome. He certainly attempted to direct the questions that were to be put on notice, rather than actually take the question on notice as put and provide the information.

I wish to mention the question that deals with the infringement notices and the investigations of public sector workplaces by the department of occupational health and safety. The minister was asked if he could provide a breakdown of incidents by department. This is not the first time that ministers have been asked for information to be broken down by department, either in questions on notice in this parliament or in the estimates committee process, and those ministers have actually been able to provide that information. But this minister did not want to provide it, not because of the work involved but because it was going to be embarrassing to the government and he was not open to that.

All the minister was prepared to do was actually say, 'We'll give a breakdown by region.' The reason he was going to give a breakdown by region was that it would hide the worst offending departments. So we still do not know whether it is the Department of Public Works, Queensland Health, the Queensland Police Service, Emergency Services or whatever that has a particularly bad record. The people of Queensland have a right to know the particular investigations which have been held into a department for alleged occupational health and safety breaches and what subsequently happened. All we could find out was that there were 1,007 workplace investigations and 585 verbal directions. Since then, we have found out that there were two infringements, and I understand they were against the Department of Public Works. The point is that we need to have a breakdown for the various departments in Queensland so we can see what is going on, particularly after the former minister for health's appalling handling of the alleged rape of a nurse on Mabuia Island, where a nurse was living in substandard and insecure accommodation. We certainly need to know what is going on so we can keep a constant watching brief on it.

The other thing I am concerned about is the appeals. The Attorney has predicted that there will be 340 appeals in the criminal jurisdiction this year. The inadequate sentence that was handed down against Gordon Nuttall—which was seven years maximum and 2½ years minimum, and this breaches public confidence and public expectation—will not be one of those appeals. I think that speaks for itself.

The other issue was the inability of the minister to be able to explain why the Electoral Commission in Queensland was not able to comply with its handbook when it comes to the registration of postal votes received and when those postal votes were sent out. I think that shows that the Attorney failed in his first outing.