



Speech by
Simon Finn

MEMBER FOR YEERONGPILLY

Hansard Wednesday, 5 August 2009

APPROPRIATION BILLS: ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

Mr FINN (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (12.08 pm): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I was likewise anxious to hear the contribution from the member for Clayfield. I am happy for him to open the batting in relation to reporting on the estimates committee. I rise to address Report No. 1 of Estimates Committee A. As you pointed out, Mr Speaker, it examined proposed expenditure in the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill, and in particular questioned the Speaker in relation to this proposed expenditure for the Legislative Assembly.

At the outset I say that it was an honour to chair this committee. I thank my fellow committee members for their participation in the scrutiny and for their cooperation and civility throughout our deliberations. I thank the Speaker for his attention to the questioning of committee members both on notice and at the hearing and for his attendance along with parliamentary officials at the committee hearing.

Scrutiny of the expenditure for the Legislative Assembly considered issues including: security audits and upgrades of electorate offices; security of the parliamentary precinct; budgeting for the parliamentary committee system; community engagement activities of the parliament; and the establishment of the Speaker's Advisory Committee. Consideration of these matters is consistent with issues examined in previous hearings of recent years. That reflects that security of the precinct requires significant expenditure and is an ongoing issue for members and also staff and visitors to the parliament.

During the hearing the Speaker reported that people attending the precinct each year included some 50,000 function patrons, 17,000 school students and 8,000 general tour patrons. Along with this comes 76,000 security scans. With these numbers of visitors it was pleasing that the Speaker reported a low level of need to require people to surrender items. The 76,000 scans resulted in only 145 confiscations. These in the main included manicure sets, scissors, cutlery and, in some cases, tools that are used by contractors.

A high number of people attending the precinct, a high number of security scans and a low level of confiscation reflects and reinforces the focus on appropriate security which ensures a safe precinct whilst maintaining the parliament as an open place. It is important we recognise the moderate levels of risk in the precinct and balance this with the need to allow access for people to their parliament. I am sure all members agree with the comments made by the Speaker that we hope we never see the day when security for MPs in this place needs to be treated in the same way as security for members of the US Congress.

Budget allocations to manage the parliamentary committee system also received significant attention during the hearing. Following the election of the Bligh government in March the government reformed the parliamentary committee structure, expanded the number and scope of committees and enabled the committees to examine key structural and policy areas.

During the scrutiny the Speaker advised the committee of budgetary changes associated with amendments to the structure. He outlined that the pooling of administrative support staff and the travel budget allocations have enabled greater efficiencies as well as an improved process for accessing travel budget allocations.

In relation to the open management of issues affecting the precinct, the Speaker informed the committee about the ongoing role of the Speaker's Advisory Committee, a bipartisan committee to consider decisions effecting management of the precinct. When we consider that there are a number of challenges managing the heritage building that we are meeting in today as well as the ageing Annexe and then some of the issues that we are all aware of in relation to plumbing, air conditioning and the demands on the parliamentary buildings, the role of the Speaker's Advisory Committee will be ongoing and will discuss the needs of the precinct and the need to provide adequate allocations to ensure that we maintain facilities in an up-to-date fashion.

I should also briefly comment on the community engagement activities of the parliament. The community engagement activities raise significant funds for charities, they partner with a range of organisations and they also provide important support across the region. Recently I came into contact with a group of speakers and deputy speakers from Papua New Guinea and the broader Pacific region who were attending seminars in our parliament aimed at assisting skills development and knowledge sharing across our parliamentary systems. This is important work that is done by our community engagement unit.

Can I finish by saying that as chair of the committee I am satisfied that the proceedings of the committee enabled adequate scrutiny of allocations to the Assembly that are contained in the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill. I acknowledge the unanimous endorsement of the report by the committee and thank the parliamentary staff who assisted with the scrutiny. I commend the report to the House.