



Speech by

Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

Hansard Thursday, 5 August 2010

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

Hon. CR DICK (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (2.49 pm): I am pleased that today's debate provides me with another opportunity to speak about the Bligh government's important and significant 2010-11 budget allocation for the Justice portfolio. Before I do that, I want to thank the chair of the committee, the member for Bundamba, for her very good work in chairing the committee as well as the very thoughtful and positive contributions made by the members for Mundingburra, Woodridge and Everton.

Turning to the budget for the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, this year's budget allocation reflects the Bligh government's commitment to making this state a fairer, safer and more just place to live. In 2010-11 the government has allocated a record \$1.046 billion for the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. This funding will help support jobs through our massive court building program, including an allocation of \$290 million this year towards the \$600 million District and Supreme courts complex in Brisbane which is currently under construction. The budget also provides funding boosts for the Office of the Adult Guardian, the Crime and Misconduct Commission, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

In my capacity as Minister for Industrial Relations I am very pleased to say that the budget provides further support for Queensland workers. We have allocated \$8 million over four years to fund a new program to improve the workplace health and safety practices at businesses with high accident and injury rates. The budget also outlines the allocation of \$61 million over four years from the Consolidated Fund to Legal Aid Queensland to provide the organisation with a more secure funding source. Overall, the 2010-11 budget for the Justice portfolio provides further evidence of Labor's ongoing determination to modernise our justice system and ensure that it remains relevant and responsive to the Queensland community.

I now want to take some time to respond to some of the spurious and inaccurate claims made by the member for Southern Downs in his statement of reservations. The member's hollow complaints about the estimates committee process deserve condemnation. On one hand, the honourable member complains that not enough time is allocated through the estimates process to properly scrutinise some portfolios, yet the member for Southern Downs spent a significant proportion of the time allocated to the opposition during my estimates committee hearing asking me about the reappointment of the Police Commissioner—something that falls outside my area of ministerial responsibility. The process for the appointment of the Police Commissioner is governed by the Police Service Administration Act, an act that falls within the ministerial responsibilities of the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services and not me as Attorney-General. A cursory reading of the administrative arrangements orders would reveal that.

The honourable member then continues his complaint by stating that no mechanism exists for ministers to fully and honestly answer questions posed during hearings. Yet when I chose to answer his questions about the Crime and Misconduct Commission, I was falsely accused by the honourable member of gagging the chair of the CMC. It is clear that the shadow Attorney-General's assessment of this year's estimates committee hearing is clouded by the failure of his own cynical attempts to subvert the process.

The best resourced opposition in the country has yet again shown itself to be the laziest. Thankfully his pathetic stunt—his shameless attempt to undermine and politicise the CMC—ultimately failed.

The honourable member has been in the House for more than two decades, so he should know by now that the budget estimates process is designed to allow scrutiny of government ministers about budget decisions and forward estimates. The people of Queensland expect ministers to be accountable for their portfolios, and I take that responsibility very seriously. If the honourable member has any concerns or complaints about the CMC, there is of course already a parliamentary committee in place to look into these matters—the bipartisan Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee. Trying to dress up his shabby stunt as some sort of blow for democracy does not hide the fact that it was still a shabby stunt and another Liberal National Party attempt to undermine the CMC.

Let us not forget that the deputy opposition leader represents a political party which has form in trying to undermine our independent corruption watchdog when it set up the Connolly-Ryan inquiry into the CJC. Unlike the Liberal National Party, I accept the responsibility that comes with my parliamentary position. I will not belittle either the parliament or the estimates committee process by twisting and manipulating that process for momentary political advantage, as those members opposite so often seek to do. As we heard, members of the opposition in Estimates Committee E had almost one hour of extra time over government members to question ministers, and still they complain.

In conclusion, I return to the \$1.046 billion budget allocation to the Justice portfolio and reiterate the Bligh government's commitment to the state's justice system. We are working hard to make Queensland a safer and fairer place to live, and we intend to continue our work with vigour.