



Speech by
Bill Byrne

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard Wednesday, 31 October 2012

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL AND APPROPRIATION BILL:
LEGAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE**

Mr BYRNE (Rockhampton—ALP) (5.56 pm): Providing a budget for the police and emergency services is a serious matter. It actually has real life or death implications for members of our community and emergency workers themselves. Therefore, the integrity of the budget requires a serious level of scrutiny, but in my view this was sadly missing from the process. I can say today without doubt that I agreed wholeheartedly with something the Premier said in this House. He stood in here and made a series of comments and statements regarding the appointment of the new Police Commissioner. His effort was only required to redeem the statements made by the minister in a press conference earlier today. It seems that the minister, without a prepared script, is unable to provide appropriate information and messages to those who want to know.

Mr Dempsey interjected.

Mr BYRNE: Well, this is a fact. You had the Premier come in and sweep up your comments about the police union.

Mr Dempsey interjected.

Mr BYRNE: It is the truth. That is what happened. The Premier came in here and swept up the mess again.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Miss Barton): Order! Member for Rockhampton, please direct your comments through the chair.

Mr BYRNE: Madam Deputy Speaker, the 2012 estimates for the portfolios of Police and Community Safety can only be characterised as a monotone of prepared scripts designed to comatose the members of the committee. This was a brilliant tactic in many respects that very nearly succeeded. The level of scrutiny of the budget was suboptimal by any measure and raised more questions about the future direction of policing and emergency services than it answered. I will give this example to illustrate my point. In an equivalent time, our good comrade the Attorney-General answered over 200 questions but the police minister managed to get through just over 60. While it may have been a very interesting tactic to limit scrutiny of this slash and burn budget, the public ought to be given a bit more respect and have important questions answered by the minister.

If I do not make some sort of stand here today, little by little, inch by inch, all of those opposite will further undermine transparency and erode public confidence in the police and emergency services. So far we have highlighted the reduction in staff members of the CMC and questioned the reduction of investigators and other staff in the police Ethical Standards Command, and this was achieved despite the limiting of scrutiny of the budget at estimates.

Mr Dempsey: You just said that you liked the new commissioner and now you're bagging him.

Mr BYRNE: If there is no script there, you do not know. I promise those opposite that I will continue to expose the shortcomings of this government and not for some sort of political point scoring but because I intend to stand up for the public who are being betrayed. I will stand up for police officers, ambos, firies, custodial officers, the SES—

Mr Dempsey: You voted against assaults on police.

Mr BYRNE: We can talk about that some other time. I will also stand up for the RFS. Unlike those opposite, I will stand up for the young Emergency Services cadets whom those opposite have failed.

Some of the delaying tactics used by the minister included answering questions in the most verbose manner using scripted answers for over 10 minutes, interrupting questions from the opposition, answering questions that were not asked, answering questions about the Ambulance Service by answering about Corrective Services and having the commissioner answer the same question just after the minister had answered it. I even helped the minister out a bit with the list of things that we did not have a chance to get to at estimates. Maybe you ought to take some notes about the things that we are going to be asking about in the future such as the loss of staff from the police, ambulance, firies, Rural Fire Service particularly and the SES not just in relation to this budget but also into the future. I have already spoken last night about firearms training and we have not forgotten recruiting.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Miss Barton): Order! Member for Rockhampton, I have already reminded you once today to direct your comments through the chair. Please do so.

Mr BYRNE: I will finish off by making a couple of straight points. Firstly, the minister displayed during estimates that he does not listen to experts. The Police Commissioner and the director of human services know that recruits should be over 21 years of age and that if you are going to allow younger people into the academy then you need to support them with expanded, sponsored, long-term education. What has happened? We have new guidelines for entry, lower age limits and less education. I will leave the House with the words of an expert, Dr Samantha Jeffries, who is a senior lecturer of justice at QUT. She said that this government is going to create a spike where people with lower socioeconomic pressures are going to increase the crime statistics.

(Time expired)