




Speech By
Annastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

APPROPRIATION BILLS: FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

 **Ms PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.07 pm): I, too, wish to place on the record my thanks to the chair and members of the committee. Let me say at the outset that I love estimates. Estimates is my favourite time of the year. I think all members of the opposition enjoy estimates just as much as I enjoy turning up every day asking questions and embarrassing government ministers who simply do not know the answers. I only hope that after two very unsuccessful years of estimates they might learn that next year they might need to do a bit of study. When you are a minister and you need to appear before an estimates hearing it does require a bit of work.

Mr Stevens interjected.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Perhaps when the member for Mermaid Beach becomes a minister he will take note of the need to do some study before appearing before an estimates hearing.

Let me turn to the issues at hand. The Premier's appearance before the Finance and Administration Committee during this year's estimates hearing exposed just how poorly the LNP government is serving Queensland. The LNP was swept to power in March 2012 on the back of a suite of promises to Queenslanders. They promised to be open and transparent, they promised to reduce government waste and they promised to lower the cost of living, particularly in relation to electricity bills. What have we found? Electricity bills have gone up by more than 22 per cent. We have had a 22.6 per cent increase. That is massive. That is not lowering the cost of living. That is putting a huge burden on everyday Queenslanders who are trying to make ends meet.

The Premier promised open and transparent government, yet he refused—and appears to continue to refuse—to release the full details of the remuneration package paid to his chief of staff. The Premier's initial response to questions about his chief of staff's salary indicated that he was 'happy to provide that information as a matter for the public record', but he declined to ask his chief of staff, who was seated right next to him for the duration of the hearing. Instead, he insisted on taking the matter on notice, explaining that, 'We are more than happy to provide an accurate, to-the-dollar figure, which is what Queenslanders deserve—nothing more, nothing less.' However, four hours later, at the end of the Premier's estimates session, he could only muster up a piece of paper that stated his chief of staff was paid at a CEO 5.1 salary level. The opposition sought more information from the Premier on several occasions throughout the committee hearing. The government's responses, to the best of our knowledge, have not included that to-the-dollar figure that the Premier promised. The Public Service Commissioner did provide a figure, but it was unclear from that response whether this included all aspects of the remuneration for this position including superannuation, motor vehicle expenses, leave allowances and any other payments that make up the remuneration package. To date the Premier is yet to state whether or not his answer included all of these remuneration components.

Perhaps the Premier is trying to avoid the answers to these questions, because we also had the issue of the hand-picked former director-general of Transport and Main Roads, Michael Caltabiano. Under questioning from the opposition at estimates, the Premier was forced to reveal that Mr Caltabiano was paid \$652,947 between 4 May 2012 and his dismissal in March 2013. This is an extraordinary amount of taxpayer funded remuneration for what was effectively five months work, as Mr Caltabiano was stood aside in October 2012.

The Premier also promised to reduce waste in government, yet at estimates the committee heard revelations of the government's misguided priorities and willingness to waste taxpayers' funds. It was revealed that \$24,000 was spent on a two-day Brisbane based cabinet meeting in August 2013. That is more than \$1,200 a head for each of the 19 cabinet ministers. The committee also heard testimony from the director-general of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet that he fully briefed the government about the impact of its decision to grant themselves a pay rise of 41.9 per cent. His testimony deposed as untrue the Deputy Premier's earlier claims that he was not aware of the decision made by cabinet while he was Acting Premier which would result in a pay rise for the Premier of around \$118,000, lifting his salary to that of the President of the United States. Finally, the Premier was unable to explain why his government has failed so dismally on its pre-election promise to reduce the cost of power bills. I look forward to estimates next year.