




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

QUEENSLAND INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION TRIBUNAL BILL

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (4.14 pm): This legislation that we have before the House today is a very important piece of legislation. I can tell you from long experience in these matters about what politicians are paid. It is a very, very painful subject. Politicians have long been subjected to insulting remarks and the low opinion of the community, and occasionally this has been as a result of their own behaviour or items appearing in the media which are designed to sell papers, et cetera. The remuneration for politicians is a very, very difficult subject to handle. A lot of people out there in the community believe we should be paid nothing, and that is their view. There are other people who work more closely with politicians and understand that they are a very essential part of our society and our community. We need politicians because they do a lot of hard work for their communities, and that work is deserving of appropriate remuneration.

From my own experience and years in local government, I recall when the then Labor government forced a brand new council, the Gold Coast City Council, to set its own remuneration. That is somewhat analogous to the present situation. I approached Terry Mackenroth, who quite clearly said, 'No, you are on your own. You set your own remuneration, and you will then pay the penalty at the ballot box.' You can imagine what fodder it was for the media and some uninformed people who said, 'We should not be paying these local government politicians any money whatsoever.' It became the hottest topic for between 12 and 18 months in that particular council region, and there was a lot of pain and agony involved in delivering an outcome that was acceptable to the community. We even went to two different sets of professional people to come up with the appropriate remuneration—which was actually about 6 per cent different to the previous remuneration—and there was a lot of exaggerated whooping and hollering everywhere about the terrible overpayment of local politicians. Nothing has strayed here from that example, and the absolute corollary is what has happened here in the state government.

Some wise state politicians before us took the decision to tie the state politicians' wages to the federal government politicians' wages, recognising that they were a bigger and bolder brand in terms of federal politicians—big brothers and sisters, as they like to see themselves—but the work that they actually do is very, very similar to the work that we do in terms of hours, commitment and dedication to the job. In both Houses on both sides of politics there are people who do not deserve to be paid the full amount. Some of them do about 50 per cent of the work that they should be doing. We all know them; you all know them. They are on both sides of the House. Those matters will be determined by the voting public in the longer term. It does not last forever.

Quite clearly most state parliamentarians do their utmost to fulfil the expectations of their communities. Premier Campbell Newman and this LNP government work as diligently to deliver outcomes for our constituents in Queensland as do our federal counterparts. Has there been an outcry about the salary of federal politicians? No, there has not. I have not had one complaint about what the three federal members from the Gold Coast are collecting by way of remuneration. What happened with this particular sorry saga is the great politicisation of a very delicate situation which led to an easy cheap shot, as they say in the footy game. I take the member for Whitsunday's gesture

over there. It is like lifting your elbow as you run through the maul and clipping some guy when he is not expecting it. That is always easy to do because the media love pulling down politicians. It sells papers, it is part of their job, and they will say that they are reflecting the community's opinion of politicians. The reality is that their opinion of politicians has been created by the repetitive printing of stories about the worthlessness of politicians. 'Politics is show business for ugly people,' as they say about politicians.

A government member: Wrap it up.

Mr STEVENS: I am really enjoying it now.

Mr Bleijie: You called me ugly!

Mr STEVENS: No. This wonderful piece of legislation sets in place a process whereby we will not have to revisit this very unseemly matter of setting one's own wages. We will not have to repeat the process that I referred to earlier which existed in local government and which the state government changed by having the board setting remuneration. We should not be setting our pay; it should be done by professionals.

I refer to the three members of the tribunal. I know of one of them—not personally that well, but I do know of his very exalted position as Vice-Chancellor of Bond University in the electorate of Mermaid Beach on the fabulous Gold Coast, represented by a local member who works hard for his constituents. I am sure that the three members will make a just determination of what politicians should be paid. The board in itself is a wonderful instrument to deliver an outcome that should put to bed the politicking from both sides of the House when that final determination comes through to this House.

There is one important matter addressed in this bill that has not been heavily debated. I am very pleased to see the matter raise its head in this legislation. I refer to the fact that the title of 'Manager of Government Business' will be returned to the exalted title of 'Leader of the House'. I congratulate all of the perpetrators of this legislation on returning that title and taking individual personalities out of the matter. I hope there will not be further debate from the opposition on the matter. I am very pleased to see the official title 'Leader of the House' returned, as opposed to 'Manager of Government Business'. The direction of the House will be fairly and squarely the responsibility of the person who is supposed to guide government business through this parliament.

Ms Palaszczuk: Is this relevant to the bill?

Mr STEVENS: It is in the bill. Thank you very much, Leader of the Opposition. From my perspective, this piece of legislation is very welcome. I look forward to a great outcome from the remuneration board when it makes its determination. I do hope it puts to bed, once and for all, the cheap political debate over these matters in this House by people who do not have actual causes or genuine matters to follow up to get a little cheap shot.