




Speech By
Hon. Jarrod Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

Record of Proceedings, 2 April 2014

MOTION: ESTIMATES HEARINGS

 **Hon. JP BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (4.36 pm): Mr Acting Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak to the motion. It is interesting that we have had for the past 20 minutes the diatribe from the member for South Brisbane. If there is any advice that I can give the opposition leader it is this: you are safe. Based on that performance by the member for South Brisbane, you are safe from the member for South Brisbane, but nothing will save you from Cameron Dick. Nothing will save the opposition leader from Cameron Dick—

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! The Attorney-General will speak through the chair.

Mr BLEIJIE: In the estimates committee process last year I was to appear on 18 July. I think I can offer something to this debate, because I was the minister who had the longest time allocated to me for the whole day. In fact, seven hours in total was allocated to me and then, as the Deputy Premier says, we had the night duty, which my honourable colleague the Minister for Police assumed after 4.30 in the afternoon and he took the hearing out into the night-time. So I had seven hours of debate in the hearing. In the short time I have, I think it is important to reflect on those seven hours.

As the Deputy Premier says, the opposition grilled me—bruised me and all, they say—for seven hours on 18 July. The motion says, for the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Tuesday, 15 July 2014 and Thursday, 17 July 2014. According to last year's estimates, I had one day. According to this motion, it looks like there will be two days for the Attorney-General and the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. If I can count, that is double the time that the opposition will have to ask me questions.

I think what is really interesting to note is that, in the seven hours of debate that we had, the Leader of the Opposition ran out of questions. I might get accused of contempt of parliament and liaising with the honourable committee members, but I remember over lunch saying to a couple of committee members, 'Estimates is really a chance for the opposition to ask the ministers who are accountable to the people of Queensland. Let them grill the ministers.' I remember suggesting to the honourable chairman of the committee, Mr Berry, 'Just cut short the Dorothy Dixers for a minute,' because I was interested to see where the opposition would go. We did that. It is important to reflect that, when the honourable government committee members, led by Mr Ian Berry, the member for Ipswich, stopped the Dorothy Dixers, he went to the opposition leader. She had a train of four or five questions that she had just finished asking me. Then the honourable chairman of the committee went to the opposition leader and said, 'Your next question?' She said, 'No, Mr Chairman, you can go to the government members now.' The chairman said, 'No, no, we're okay. You're on a roll. Keep asking the questions.' Mr Berry said, 'This is a chance to grill the Attorney-General. Keep on your questions.'

On three or four occasions the opposition leader said, 'No, it is the government allotted time now.' It was the government's time to hold the minister from the government accountable for their Dorothy Dixers. I think it is in *Hansard*. The opposition went into the estimates period with the schedule. The opposition leader talks about lawyers a lot. She personally attacks me. As I understand

it, she has a law degree but has never practised. She could not go from issue to issue to issue without having a break so that government members could ask the government questions.

It was very interesting when the honourable chairman, Mr Berry—who did a fantastic job on the committee—said, ‘No, we do not have any further questions to ask the Attorney.’ What did the opposition leader do when she was faced with having no questions in front of her because her overresourced staff did not prepare anything because they did not expect that? Under our new estimates format you do not only ask the minister questions, you can ask questions of the directors-general or the heads of the jurisdictions. In my department there is the Electoral Commissioner, the Ombudsman and the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner.

We had about four hours of committee left and the opposition ran out of questions for me so the Leader of the Opposition got the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner up and essentially said, ‘Thank you, Mr Cocks. Would you like to describe to the committee what you do?’ Having that conversation for an hour, the opposition leader then got the Acting Electoral Commissioner up, Mr Walter van der Merwe, and said, ‘So, Electoral Commissioner, how’s it going?’ ‘What do you do?’ ‘What’s this project?’ ‘What’s that project?’ I still did not get a question because she did not have anything prepared. Then finally the opposition leader got the Ombudsman up and said, ‘Oh, Ombudsman, what does your office do?’ ‘How’s it all going?’ We had another hour of that. With respect to these fine individuals, it was four hours of my life I will never get back. With respect to the individuals, everything those opposite asked for the last four hours of the estimates was, ‘What do you do?’

Estimates is about grilling the ministers, getting into the details. Those opposite talk about conspiracies, controversies and crises. It is not a crisis when you get the Electoral Commissioner up and say, ‘What do you do for a living?’ It is not a crisis when you get the Ombudsman up and say, ‘What does your office do?’ It is not a catastrophe. It is not a minister that is going to go to jail when you get the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner up and say, ‘What projects are your department undertaking?’, and, ‘What does your office do?’ For four hours we did that.

The other point made by those opposite was with respect to this being the chance to bring down the government. I have seen a tendency in the estimates process for members of the opposition to not in fact ask the ministers questions in any event. It is all the public servants. When we were in opposition we had the chance to do that, but we wanted to hold the minister accountable. If the minister required further information from the directors-general or other heads of the jurisdictions they were there to be asked those particular questions. The point is that the opposition leader ran out of questions and I and other members and officers of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General had to sit there for four hours as we saw the opposition leader run out of questions but then ask basic questions such as, ‘What do you do for a living?’ to the Electoral Commissioner, the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner and the Ombudsman. It is all in *Hansard*.

I found it interesting when the member for Mulgrave, who said he was going to make a very long contribution to the debate today, talked about the matter of privilege suddenly arising that he raised this morning. I recall yesterday the opposition leader getting up and raising a matter of privilege complaining that she was on television or being filmed. It is interesting that the opposition leader is complaining today that there might be committee rooms without cameras and the media will not be able to film her. Again those opposite are flip-flopping. One day they are complaining they are being filmed, now they are complaining they are not going to get their 15 minutes of fame, they will not be on television. Where does the flip-flopping for this opposition end?

I take the point the Deputy Premier made in an interjection, which I hope made it into *Hansard*, when the member for South Brisbane was saying the current opposition leader attended 98 per cent of the estimates hearings. I agree with the interjection the Deputy Premier made: that is because she did not trust any of her shadow ministers to do it on their own. In fact, the member of the opposition who serves on the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee, the member for Rockhampton, did not show up to the committee during the whole day of estimates. He then had to come for the night duty. They sent the member for Bundamba and the member for Inala, the opposition leader, along to the committee. The member of the committee did not even show up to ask me about his great love or dislike of boot camps. He never even used the process of estimates. Now they will have two days to grill the Attorney-General. I am supporting the motion, but I hope I do not have to go through two days of what I had to go through for 3½ hours last time I was grilled in estimates and then have to listen to all the heads of the jurisdictions for two days get asked what they do for a living. But if that is their big strategy then that is fine.

I think the estimates process will be improved by these amendments. There is obviously more time allocated to the process. This is a process where the opposition should hold the ministers to account. Nothing will stop the opposition from doing their job, carrying out their responsibility, as

Queenslanders would expect them to do, with this new process. They will have two days—more than they have at the moment—to grill every member. The crossbenches will have ample opportunity; probably more opportunity than what they had under other circumstances. I think two days is sufficient time, more time than they have at the moment.

I would urge Queenslanders or the media watching this debate this afternoon to look at the record of *Hansard* for the estimates committee for the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee last year where just after lunch the opposition leader actually ran out of a strategy. She completely ran out of a strategy because she went into the room relying on government Dorothy Dixers to get her by. If that is how they want to fill the time, that is fine. I would much rather fill the time being grilled all the time by the opposition. If they are not going to come to the party with appropriate questions and a strategy, the question is: what are they even doing there? What sort of opposition does Queensland have? I suspect that is why the puppetmasters in the Labor Party are bringing back Cameron Dick. They have seen the performance of this opposition over two years. There is no opposition in Queensland—I will rephrase that: there is an opposition, there is no leader in the opposition. That is why they are bringing back Cameron Dick.

I support the comments made by the Deputy Premier. This is a more transparent process. The opposition will have more opportunity to do what they are paid to do—that is, hold the government to account. They will have two days to do it, whereas before they had only one.