




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Utilities, Science and Innovation Committee, Report

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (11.28 pm): I rise to speak to the 2015 Appropriation Bill, particularly as it pertains to the Utilities, Science and Innovation portfolios. On the day of this committee's estimates hearing we saw that the protection racket from those opposite was not limited to the CFMEU and the police minister; it was alive and well in the ETU as well. It was probably the first time ever that a committee chair had 'phone a friend'. Every time I as the shadow minister endeavoured to ask a question of the energy and water supply minister, it was, 'Kinky, it's Peter Simpson here, mate. You can't ask that question.' The first question was a question on future electricity prices and the endeavours, particularly of Ergon but also of Energex, to increase electricity prices over the next five years. 'Kinky here.' 'No, can't ask that question, mate, ruled out of order.' Questions on job cuts in Ergon: 'Kinky here.' 'No, can't ask that one either.'

Let me give honourable members a classic example of how this played out, and I refer members to pages 21 and 22 of the transcript from the estimates hearing, but particularly page 22. I will start with a comment from the chair after I put a question to the head of Ergon about potential job cuts. The transcript states—

CHAIR: Once again, I really do not think that that question is relevant to the Appropriation Bill.

Mr POWELL: The minister just outlined in a lengthy response his views on front-line service positions.

CHAIR: Yes, within the public sector. This is a government owned corporation.

Mr POWELL: This is within the government owned corporation. It was also referring to his comments about what he considers to be a front-line worker within a government owned corporation. I am struggling to see how you can distinguish between the two.

CHAIR: Because there is standing order 180.

Mr POWELL: Correct, but you allowed the minister's response without question.

And here it is—

CHAIR: I did, and I was—

A government member: Fascinating!

Mr POWELL: No, there is a lesson here for the member for Capalaba. It goes on—

CHAIR: I did, and I was not quick enough to pick it up, but I am picking it up here. Have you got another line of questioning?

That is an ETU protection racket through and through. Why are they wanting to prevent the energy minister, the head of Ergon and the head of Energex from answering these questions? The Labor Party went to the election with a couple of key policies around electricity. Firstly, they said they would pay down the government's debt by using the revenue from our electricity companies; secondly,

they said there would be no job cuts in our electricity companies; and, thirdly, they said they would keep electricity prices down. We now know there are three from three; none of them are going to occur. For starters, they are not using the revenue from the electricity companies to pay down debt. They are, in fact, lumping the electricity companies with additional debt to the point that they cannot afford to pay down the debt, continue to manage the networks and make sure there is some money put away for that inevitable rainy day that we here in Queensland have. That means that Ergon and Energex have to go running off to the AER asking for more money. When you ask the AER, the Australian Energy Regulator, for more money and if you get that, what does that mean? Electricity prices are going to go up. We saw it five years ago when Andrew Fraser went running off to the federal minister saying, 'Please give us some more, sir. Please give us some more.' We got whacked with double-digit increases in our network prices over the subsequent five years. We are seeing it again. We have heard that if they do not get this new revenue that they are seeking from the Energy Regulator, at least 800 jobs will go in Ergon.

I come back to what I started with: why did we see the ETU protection racket during the estimates hearing on that day? We saw it Monday a week ago when that came out from the head of Ergon in front of the minister. Who was out here within the parliament's grounds 30 minutes later saying, 'Over my dead body. I will take higher electricity prices any day over seeing 800 jobs go from Ergon Energy.'? Who was it? It was the head of the ETU, Peter Simpson. He was out the front of parliament saying, 'I will take higher electricity prices over job cuts any day.' Labor members say one thing when they are in opposition and do a complete and utter other thing when they are in government. They have completely misled the people of Queensland when it comes to keeping electricity prices down, paying down their debt and securing the jobs in Ergon and Energex.

(Time expired)