




Speech By  
**Tarnya Smith**

**MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY**

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Record of Proceedings, 16 August 2016

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL**

 **Mrs SMITH** (Mount Ommaney—LNP) (10.15 pm): Our committee examined three portfolios. I say three portfolios because for the second year in a row we learned that the Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland has no public servants, has no legislation to be responsible for and has no budget allocation. To my mind you cannot properly scrutinise a minister's performance and how she is delivering on her responsibilities when there is nothing to measure it against except her word that she is doing her job. We see the title and all the trappings and trimmings that go with it, but ultimately when we get down to transparency and accountability there is nothing to measure that against. I think that is a bit disappointing.

Turning to child safety, I think it is reasonable that non-government members have concerns regarding the blowouts in child safety investigations. There are growing concerns because there is a backlog. The previous member said that we should all work together and no-one should be blamed, but while there are vulnerable children who are not being seen I think it is important that every single member in this place asks the question why and what can be done better. I will harp on because when it suits the Labor government they say, 'It is the LNP's fault that this happened.' Let us be very clear about child safety and what we inherited when we came into government.

We came into a child safety department that was unsustainable. We tripled the budget in 10 years and yet the numbers went up and up and up. I remind the Deputy Premier that we instigated the \$406 million Carmody inquiry and allowed it to continue for 12 months. There were 121 recommendations in the report, and had the recommendations been followed to the letter it should have been an absolute reform. It was this side of the House that put in \$406 million towards that 10-year road map. It is critical that when children are not being seen in the recommended time frames—be it 24 hours, five days or 10 days—there are serious repercussions because there are lives at stake and it is the government which has the responsibility. I think it is vitally important that we ask the questions that we ask. Our shadow minister is being diligent in the way that she is pursuing this because so far the answers are not acceptable.

I raise an issue regarding the debt collection agency about which I will be writing to the minister. The situation of a constituent who came into my office last week is very distressing. To give members a bit of an understanding, in 2010 she had an overpayment. She was contacted about the overpayment and she paid it back. She heard nothing for another year. In 2011 she received a letter stating, 'We think you have been overpaid. Please fill out this form and send it back to us.' She sent back the form and heard not another word for four years. She thought it must have been resolved.

**A government member** interjected.

**Mrs SMITH:** Four years went by and she had not heard anything.

**A government member** interjected.

**Mrs SMITH:** But she had not heard anything. I am not going to waste my time with you, yappy man. She received another letter in 2016. After 2011 she heard not another word. The letter states—

During our most recent conversation you outlined you would look at the overpayment information—

which she never received. All she is asking is for a fair go to understand, because the amounts coming to her are completely different. It is only fair and reasonable that all of the information is provided to her so that she can see whether she has had an overpayment. Given the information that has been provided so far, it is nothing short of sloppy work.