



Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

**Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence
Prevention Committee, Report**

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (4.21 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Appropriation Bill for this year. I will begin with some comments on the estimates process. I along with many other commentators have highlighted previously just how broken estimates is, and I have made a number of suggestions to improve the process which are now on the record in a statement of reservation to the health committee's report on this year's estimates hearings.

When I asked the Premier about these suggestions in estimates, her response was dismissive and disappointing to say the least. She and the government have clearly decided that it is not in their interests to make estimates a robust, meaningful mechanism to hold ministers and the executive government to account. It will indeed be a very sad thing if Labor leaves government at some point in the future but has not improved this process because, while the LNP enjoys excoriating the government for its approach to estimates now, we would be foolish to think that its interest in estimates reform would extend into any future term of an LNP government.

A comprehensive review is required, but Labor could right now make the following simple changes to improve this process. Firstly, we could abolish or severely restrict Dorothy Dixers from government MPs. If Labor MPs cannot get answers outside of estimates from Labor ministers, then there is something seriously wrong with the government. Otherwise, if the ministers' answers to Dorothy Dixers are so important, then they can go and read them to a press pack on the green.

Secondly, we could double the amount of time available for questions by having two committees sit simultaneously for the full seven-day period of estimates. I am not talking about running every committee hearing concurrently over two days, as the LNP did previously, but instead allowing for twice the time we have currently and continuing to run it over a full two weeks of hearings.

Thirdly, we could make sure all hearings are chaired by non-government MPs. Non-government MPs are all entirely capable of running proceedings here in the House, so why could we not have non-government MPs chairing committees to prevent chairs from shamelessly abusing their position and allowing baseless procedural points to protect the ministers' and the government's interests? Fourthly, we could allow all interested MPs an opportunity to ask questions on notice ahead of the hearings, rather than limiting this to the six members of each committee.

Finally, we could publicise the hearings a little more widely and encourage ordinary people to attend so that all ministers, chairs and every MP in attendance could have that extra motivation to be on their best behaviour. The thing that perhaps worries me most about this broken process is that it can create the illusion of transparency without really allowing us to hold the government to account.

Despite all this, having attended seven days of estimates, I did learn a few important things about the budget this year. I will not confine my comments to health, having been to all seven days. The Premier has made statements previously that she would like to see fewer pokies in Queensland, and I have been curious ever since whether this is a position Queensland Labor has adopted in policy. The Premier could not give me an answer straight up, but the Attorney-General subsequently confirmed that the government has no policy to reduce the number of pokies in Queensland. Despite the ample evidence of the harm caused to Queensland communities by pokies, we have nothing but a thought bubble from the Premier. One day she thinks it might be a nice idea to reduce the number of pokies. The next day, nothing.

We can only hope it is the same with the disgusting, draconian, anti-democratic proposal that was flagged this morning in another thought bubble. Is the Premier really prepared to legislate away our right to peaceful protest without any evidence of the supposed 'locking devices that are laced with traps which are dangerous'?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McArdle): Member for Maiwar, with respect, I am a bit concerned that you are drifting away from the estimates process and into comments made by the Premier today. Unless you can bring it back, I ask you to please move on to a new topic.

Mr BERKMAN: Certainly. They were thought bubbles on pokies; hopefully, we are seeing thought bubbles on peaceful protests.

I have been keenly interested in what, if anything, the government is doing to work with thermal coal mining communities to deal with the transition away from thermal coal and the decline in our thermal coal exports. The budget tells us that this is already happening and we know it must continue very rapidly if we are to meet our targets under the Paris Agreement. I had to ask questions of four ministers to get a clear sense that, no, there is no plan and no funding in the budget to plan for the transition in thermal coal communities. The department of communities is funding specific programs in the North West Minerals Province 'to adapt to changing economic conditions', but there is no equivalent for those in the Bowen Basin, where any downturn in thermal coal exports will hit the hardest. Queensland does have what is called a Just Transition Group, but this will only address the energy sector. The Minister for Employment and Small Business clarified—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Stop the clock. Member for Maiwar, I appreciate you are the only member of your party in the chamber, but with respect this is about the health committee's estimates proceedings and you need to confine your comments to that or at least draw some analogy with what you are going to say to the committee itself.

Mr BERKMAN: I thank you for your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is yet another disappointing facet of this process that, having appeared before each of the committees and with only an hour here to debate the reports of each committee—

Mr Power interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Logan. I will take care of the chamber if you do not mind. Member for Maiwar, I am going to bring you back again to the report before the House. Please come back to the health committee's report and talk to that.

Mr BERKMAN: Thank you. I thank the committee for its work. I especially thank the secretariat, as always. I can only say I look very much forward to next year's budget estimates process.