




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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MOTION

Non-Government Members, Resources

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (3.08 pm): It is nice to see this welcome development where we now all agree that adequate resourcing of all MPs in here, including the crossbench, is fundamental to a well-functioning democracy. That is especially so in Queensland where we are deprived of the broader proportionate representation that other states enjoy by virtue of having an upper house.

The role of the crossbench in this parliament is increasingly important and not only when the government considers it might need to rely on crossbench support to pass legislation. At present, as we all know, the Premier doles out resources as she sees fit, leaving the whole process open to political interference and culminating in ultimately a contempt of parliament, as we have seen described in this Ethics Committee report No. 189. This is precisely what we saw in the last parliament when the KAP was relied on after Billy Gordon and Rob Pyne jumped ship, leaving the ALP in the surprise position of being a minority government. Those resourcing arrangements just rolled over into this parliament, but this only became public knowledge after I asked a question in estimates last year.

The role of the crossbench is integral even when there is a clear majority in this House since that majority does not reflect the diversity of views in the Queensland community more broadly. The raw numbers of staff in government, opposition and the crossbench offices are frankly alarming. These are in addition to the two electorate officers that all of us have. The numbers are: 217 staff for the government, including 34 for the Premier; 22 staff for the opposition, about 10 per cent; and zero for the crossbench. In a state with no upper house, a frighteningly weak committee system and extremely limited scrutiny by the media, such a massive imbalance is generally terrible for democracy.

Crossbenchers can represent far more than just their seat. For instance, I as the member for Maiwar take my job representing my electorate very seriously, but I am also here representing the 270,000 Queenslanders—10 per cent of the state vote—who voted for the Greens at the last election. Our electoral system means that the two old parties—Labor and the LNP—garnered less than 70 per cent of the vote but ended up with 94 per cent of the seats in parliament, whereas the Greens got 10 per cent and ended up with one per cent of the seats. These figures clearly demonstrate the urgent need for democratic reforms to address this disproportionate representation, but that is a conversation for another day.

When Labor sells out on progressive values like they are doing with their laws against peaceful protests, I am left as the only MP in here holding them to account. If I and other parties outside government rely on the good favour of the Premier for the resources we need to do our jobs most effectively, democracy suffers across the state. I will be the only MP, as far as I know, standing in here opposing those laws against peaceful protest. I am the only MP calling for 100 per cent publicly owned clean energy, the only MP campaigning to ban corporate—

Mr KELLY: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order under standing order 118, relevance.

Mr Bleijie: That is in question time. There is no 118—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McArdle): Member for Kawana, I am just about to address the chamber on a point of order. I do not need your assistance, so please do not do so again. Member for Maiwar, you are straying from the motion. Please come back to the motion.

Mr BERKMAN: Thank you for your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker. The point I am making is that the role we play as crossbenchers is far beyond just as representatives of our local communities. The fact that we are not representing the views of Queensland on issues like banning corporate donations, cash for access meetings and putting a tax on property developers so they pay their fair share is a failure of this parliament; we are failing to reflect the will of the people on those issues.

On the other hand, just this morning we have seen a striking example of the real benefits that come from an active crossbench. This week we will be debating the government's bill to implement some recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. That is a bill that the government introduced after I introduced my own private member's bill dealing with effectively the same issues, but the government's bill had some really striking omissions. Just this morning the government announced that they will amend their bill to adopt some of my proposals, which is a huge win for survivors of child sexual abuse. I am not here seeking credit for this win. I am not expecting any fanfare—

Mr KELLY: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order around anticipation of a bill before the House.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have taken advice on that. That is the case, member for Maiwar. Please do not do so again but come back to the terms of the motion before the chamber.

Mr BERKMAN: Thank you, again, for your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker. Again, the point I am making is that any honest observer will accept that the crossbench plays an important role in making political progress for the good of all Queenslanders, not just the ever-dwindling number of people who can hold their nose and bring themselves to still vote for the old parties and not just for the big corporate donors who continue to buy access and influence from those same old parties.

I support this motion and I welcome the move from the Premier to put the question of non-government party staffing in the hands of the Queensland Independent Remuneration Tribunal. Indeed, I wrote to the Premier in August 2018 calling for more support for all members of the crossbench so we can better fulfil our functions. In response to the Manager of Opposition Business I say that I do not support any amendment to the motion that would restrict the new independent oversight to just the crossbench.

(Time expired)