



Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Community Support and Services Committee, Report

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (3.37 pm): I rise to make my contribution on this year's budget estimates report of the Community Support and Services Committee. Before anything else, I express my thanks to the committee staff in particular for all the time and effort they put into arranging these hearings, all of the public servants throughout the seven days of estimates who make themselves available for questioning, and all of those people behind the scenes who spend countless hours preparing for every conceivable question that ministers might be asked. I want to acknowledge them especially because so much of that work goes to waste. Yet again this year we have gone through an estimates process where we are denied the opportunity to apply genuine scrutiny to the government.

Mr Sullivan interjected.

Mr BERKMAN: There is some muttering going on from the member for Stafford. If he wants to interject he is more than welcome to.

This year we have a couple of fresh voices who have joined the chorus of criticism. We are well aware of the comments that came from Professor Peter Coaldrake in his review. It is noteworthy that he identified that both sides of the House have contributed to a pretty pathetic estimates process over the years and a decline.

It was interesting to hear from the Clerk this year about how the quality of the estimates process is, in his view, worse in some respects than it was before the 2011 review of the committee system. Year on year we are certainly not seeing any improvement in the process. To hear from someone with as much experience in this place as the Clerk of the Parliament that it is not just failing to live up to expectations but is in fact getting worse than it was before we last reviewed the committee system is telling. It is a pretty shocking indictment not only on this government's record but its complete disinterest in allowing any scrutiny of what is going on behind the scenes.

The problems are the same as they have been year on year. There is just not enough time. The member for South Brisbane and I endeavoured to share whatever slim time was available to us and the rest of the crossbench. We were told at one of the committee hearings at about lunchtime that we would be allowed two questions for the remainder of the day. I do not know how anyone can look at a set-up like that and pretend that that is genuine scrutiny—a once-a-year process.

Mr Sullivan: Take it up with the opposition.

Mr BERKMAN: I take the interjection from the member for Stafford. If budget estimates is like a masterclass or the embodiment of everything that is wrong with this parliament and the government's approach to it then perhaps the member for Stafford is himself actually the embodiment, the personification, of everything that is busted about the Labor Party. Let's face it: this bloke would not be here were it not for his daddy's time here. The kind of sycophancy and subservience that he puts forward, particularly in the estimates hearings, is just extraordinary.

Government members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Lui): Members to my right, order!

Mr BERKMAN: Honestly, how he can sit there with a straight face and put his question to the minister, 'Minister, I have a very important question on behalf of my electorate,' and then not vomit under the table when the minister pays him credit back when responding, 'Well I know the member for Stafford is, of course, very concerned about his electorate.'

Ms McMILLAN: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I remind the member that allocation of crossbench time is the responsibility of non-government members, not government members. I believe he is misleading the House.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order, member.

Mr BERKMAN: It is simple: give us more time.

Ms Boyd: You have the lion's share.

Mr BERKMAN: Again, the government continue to say that the opposition and crossbench get more time than they do. It is their government we are meant to be scrutinising. Why do they need any time? They can hold a press conference. They can stand out the front with the minister and sing each other's praises and pat each other on the back. It does not have to be done at estimates.

Government members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members to my right, order!

Mr BERKMAN: The opposition at least has enough time to pursue a line of questioning or two; the crossbench gets cut off. That was absolutely my experience in this committee hearing when I asked questions about the opaque nature of the social housing eligibility criteria. They keep coming back again and again and we keep hearing what I can only consider to be misleading responses from the department pretending that they have not changed. These interruptions, the baseless points of order—it is an absolute farce of a process. If the government are not going to take steps to improve it, they need to at least just own up to the fact that they have no interest in scrutiny or accountability.

(Time expired)