



Speech By
Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

Record of Proceedings, 22 August 2023


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation (Parliament) Bill

Economics and Governance Committee, Report

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (11.25 am): I, too, rise to make a brief contribution to the 2023-24 budget estimates for the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 2023 estimates hearing report. At the outset, I put on record our support and thanks to the Acting Speaker and more importantly to the Clerk of the Parliament and to all his staff who do an outstanding job in providing a service to not only us here as members of parliament but also our electorate staff in each of the electorates, from right up on the tip of the cape down to the border at Currumbin and out west to places such as Warrego, Gregory and Mount Isa. Broader than that, they also provide a service to the people of Queensland such as, as the member for Logan mentioned, the many school students and the many members of the public who take the time to come into this, their house, and understand the processes of democracy and how this place operates. It is with genuine, heartfelt thanks that we do thank the Clerk and all of the staff here on the precinct. We know that this appropriation goes to covering their salaries and many of the programs and services that they offer, and we do add our thanks.

I want to address one of the matters that the member for Logan raised when he suggested that somehow by asking questions about the Cairns regional sitting of parliament it implied we were attacking that process. It is quite the opposite. The whole intent of the budget estimates process is so that members of the opposition and the crossbench and, for that matter, members of the backbench within the government can ask questions of the ministers and of, in this case, the Acting Speaker as to the operation of how the government expends its money. It is quite simply trying to ascertain what some of the costs were involved in taking parliament to Cairns. No-one is questioning the benefits that it produces but it is understanding what the costs were and where the costs were split between this House and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, and that was where we left that line of questioning.

At the outset, I also want to thank the Clerk for responding to my questions at the hearing around how the hearings themselves operate and particularly for clarifying that when a question is put to a director-general or a CEO the minister cannot interfere. Despite that, I think deputy chairs across the board saw a number of attempts by ministers to interject on directors-general and CEOs rather than allowing the director-general or CEO to answer those questions themselves. We also saw an interesting practice where a number of chairs asked if the minister would like to add anything at the end of those answers. In most instances I will accept that the chairs accurately took that off government time. However, in some instances they did not.

We did see a number of other interesting stalling tactics this year. I have to give it to the members of the government and the chairs in particular: they come up with new ways each and every year. The latest one—and the member for Logan was a good proponent of it—was to try to rephrase the question. As we explained to a number of the chairs, if we had wanted their help writing the questions in the first place when they were not ruled out of order we would have had them do that at the pre meetings. The issue here is that the questions were not out of order. There was no issue of the question being in order; it was simply giving the minister or the director-general an opportunity to gather their thoughts before answering the question.

The other classic that we saw—and I think it was the member for Bancroft in particular who was the exponent of this one—was checking who the question was to, whether it was to the minister or the CEO. If the chair was doing his job properly and actually listening, he would have very clearly heard in every instance that when a question was put by the opposition the question was put clearly to either a minister or a director-general and did not require the chair to ask the question again as to whom it should be directed to.

They are inventive. They keep coming up with tactics to protect and stall and suck up time allocated to the opposition to ask these questions.

During the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill estimates hearing we also asked some questions about the committee process and the ability of ministers to answer questions on notice on time. We found out some interesting information: that nearly 120 questions put to ministers this year were not responded to on time. Interestingly, the reason that about half of those were not responded to on time was because the parliament staff had sent them back to the minister to actually answer the question correctly. I anticipate there will be more said on that. We are pleased to hear that there have not been any workplace health and safety issues associated with the renovations here at parliament. Again I want to add our thanks to all staff.