



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

Record of Proceedings, 23 August 2023


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Community Support and Services Committee, Report

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (3.15 pm): I rise to make my contribution on the Community Support and Services Committee's estimates report for this year—another year, another estimates fortnight. As in previous years, I showed up to every day of the hearings. My key reflection is that they are seven days of my life I will never get back. It is hard to know what is more frustrating: seven days of estimates or the seven hours we have spent in here listening to more of the same nonsense and rhetoric.

This year government members have gone to new lengths trying to justify a process that they and everyone else who has seen it know is completely busted. The mental gymnastics are quite extraordinary. I would go so far as to call them ridiculous or even embarrassing in some instances. We heard a really nifty arithmetical justification from some of the chairs. We heard about the number of questions that were asked by government members of committees compared to non-government members, which is completely meaningless when you acknowledge the fact that when government members throw out their Dorothy Dixers each of them gets a good solid few minutes in response. The self-aggrandisement, self-congratulations and back-patting are really—

Mr Smith: That's a bit rough.

Mr BERKMAN: The member for Hervey Bay was there—he knows it—as was the member for Bundaberg. There is a theory at play that, for each very concerned furrow of the brow as he asked a question, the member for Bundaberg might gain himself another vote. I reckon he asked eight questions, so he has probably doubled his margin at this estimates hearing.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr BERKMAN: Yes, I know that Newman was worse. Newman was worse. There is no doubt about that. Two days is really bad, but no-one cares anymore. We are talking about this government's record and the way this government chooses to conduct itself in one of the most important exercises in transparency, accountability and government scrutiny this parliament has. It is perhaps the only one and it is completely busted.

I welcome that the LNP has come on board, and I will believe their commitment to reform estimates if and when I see it. I hope it does not come to that. I hope this mob can get themselves together and introduce a worthwhile process. The changes that are needed are really simple. It is not tough stuff: we need more time. A number of times in this estimates debate we have heard government members say that if we want better estimates we just have to ask better questions. We have heard ministers list the questions that were not asked. I have a list of questions as long as my arm that we, as crossbench members, did not have time to ask. The Minister for Transport made the observation that in four hours of estimates hearings we did not ask about X, Y or Z issue. As if four hours is a long time when you split it up amongst Dorothy Dixers! We need more time.

We need non-government chairs, and I say this without being disparaging of any one chair in particular. The member for Kurwongbah always does a cracking job—he just sits back and enjoys the ride; it is excellent—but non-government chairs could make a huge difference in terms of allowing us to have an uninterrupted line of questioning.

In terms of questions on notice, we always hear about the amount of preparation, and I have seen it myself from the inside of the Public Service. The amount of preparation that goes into estimates is extraordinary. It is a valuable process for the departments as much as it is for us as MPs. Why aren't each of us allowed the opportunity to ask questions on notice of each and every minister? I can see no reason why we would not allow that basic transparency measure.

It is so straight forward to say that the Dorothy Dixers are a waste of time in here and they are a waste of time in estimates. It really is frankly embarrassing. If the government members sitting on these committees cannot see how embarrassing and how transparently self-congratulatory and useless it is, then it is time to take a look in the mirror. It is not just the case for government members of the committees; the entire government needs to reconsider just how much of a bunch of fools they take the public for. Do they honestly think that anyone who pays attention to the way this process is operated does not look at it and see it for the joke that it is? It is an absolute joke. It is a bad joke. If the government did not have anything to hide, if they were actually interested in keeping government rather than letting the other mob take the reins, they would draw the curtains back and let us use the time.