



Speech By
Ray Stevens


MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

Record of Proceedings, 21 August 2024

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL
APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)
Appropriation Bill**

Cost of Living and Economics Committee, Report

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (12.04 pm): From my long-serving presence on this particular committee, I can say that this year the estimates hearings to examine the appropriation bills were greatly improved in terms of the time allocated for questioning. The new arrangements in relation to 70 per cent of the time being given to non-government members, including the crossbench members, enabled proper questioning at the estimates hearings, although some of the answers dealt with obfuscation and the dodging of facts. In terms of the estimates process, old-timers such as Terry Mackenroth and Robbie Schwarten would have cringed at the attempts by some members to basically dodge giving accurate answers to the questions that were asked. The fact that the appropriation bill that deals with the Parliamentary Service was examined on the preceding day was of enormous help to the questioning process and I support that going forward.

However, as mentioned earlier, it was embarrassing that the Premier could not answer the questions about the flights that the DPC organised. He could not or would not answer the questions in relation to the cost of the jets. Those are matters that concern the public. Politicians spending taxpayer money in a willy-nilly fashion is very hurtful to people who are suffering from the cost of living. That is exactly why, under the Westminster system, it is important—indeed it is incumbent—that the opposition see where politicians are wasting taxpayers' money. The fact that they took two jets but the Premier did not know or was not prepared to give the cost was an embarrassment to the government. Later in the estimates hearing Mr Gollschewski said, 'Yes, one was 84 and one was 83.' They spent \$167,000 worth of taxpayers' money at a time when the public is suffering cost-of-living issues and is very concerned about those issues, and that is why the opposition appropriately asked those questions at the estimates hearings.

We also asked about a very expensive so-called trade mission to the states during which \$10,000 was spent on a four-wheel drive. No-one could understand how that sort of expenditure could relate to a four-wheel drive. There were also nights spent in very expensive, high-class accommodation. These are the things that give politicians a bad name. That is why, under the Westminster system, it is important for the opposition to ask questions of a government that seem to want to hide all the facts and basically run away from their absolute commitment to providing cost-of-living relief and being frugal in very difficult times. They spent up big on very expensive hotel rooms and other things, but we were told that it was all worth it because the mission resulted in trade deals worth \$30 million, or whatever it was, which justified that very expensive trip.

Questions were asked about Callide, which the great member for Nanango just raised in her speech. The government was asked why the power station has not been fixed. It is absolutely critical to know why the Callide report has been dodged and they have spent \$10 million hiding it. The fact of the matter is that electricity prices have gone up by 19 per cent under this government, which owns the wholesalers. The government has said, 'Here's a grand to make you feel good about the whole thing.' I had someone in my office today asking if he could cash that in for a television. The bottom line is that this absolute mess in relation to the cost of living and power prices has been caused by the government. If Callide had been operating three years ago then we would have much cheaper electricity prices, without a doubt. At estimates it is the job of the opposition to find out why. We saw obfuscation, ducking and weaving by ministers who were trying to hide the facts and basically keep down the political noise about coal and coal-fired stations, which they did not like but apparently they do now that some serious royalties and also some serious GST are rolling in. The fact of the matter is that they are the cause of a lot of the cost-of-living pressures and the sooner we get them out the better.