



Speech by

**Jann Stuckey**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

Hansard Thursday, 28 August 2008

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## **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Mrs STUCKEY** (Currumbin—Lib) (11.40 am): In addressing the Appropriation Bill 2008 and the report of Estimates Committee D, I would firstly like to express my appreciation to the chair, the honourable member for Cleveland, for the extremely fair and even-handed manner in which he managed his estimates committee. I extend my sincere thanks to the research staff, headed by Deborah Jeffrey, and all departmental staff in attendance. In my capacity as deputy chair, I commend all members of this committee for the manner in which they conducted themselves and the spirit of friendly cooperation.

As we return to parliament after the winter recess and to address the reports of the various estimates committees, I am once again struck by the wasteful nature of the process undertaken by this Labor government. Rather than provide Queenslanders with a real 'look at the books', the estimates process limits proper scrutiny of the government's expenditure. This year the government tried a new type of camouflage approach by renaming the Ministerial Portfolio Statements, which used to be individualised documents. A conglomerate of several portfolios were all bound up together in the one book titled Service Delivery Statements—and slim pickings they are at that.

I direct my comments to my shadow responsibility at that time of child safety. Child Safety is a critically important portfolio with a budget of \$586.6 million, yet it received a mere 14 pages of information. A more detailed report from the Treasurer would have allowed for a more acceptable level of scrutiny in order to assess the level of resources applied to this department. 'Transparency and accountability' is the mantra of this government but in reality these much-touted qualities are rarely displayed. In fact, more often than not quite the opposite occurs.

Receiving responses to questions on notice less than 24 hours prior to the actual commencement of committee hearings greatly inhibits the capacity to further research the completeness and accuracy of answers provided. The integrity of the estimates committee process is grossly compromised due to amendments made to the Queensland Criminal Code Act 1899 in June 2006 which abolished the crime of knowingly providing false evidence to the Legislative Assembly or a committee. This legislation was referred to in the *Courier-Mail* on 30 May 2006 as 'freedom-to-lie laws'.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr English): Order! I need to seek advice on this.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I am quoting from a newspaper article.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I understand that. Your side of the House currently has a bill before parliament in relation to this matter. Given the fact that the LNP currently has a bill on this issue before the House, the standing orders in relation to anticipating debate come into play and I direct that you move on to another topic.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I lost more than a minute of my time then and I do seek an extension. It was over a minute of time.

The minister seems to think that boasting that the Labor government has tripled the budget and doubled front-line staff in the past three or four years is all that needs to happen in her department. I guess I should not be surprised that the minister takes a bureaucratic rather than a humane approach as, like

many other Bligh government departments, Child Safety has become cold and heartless. Even so, it was clear that the minister and her department had used dated and incomplete figures to forward estimate the 2008-09 budget. Overall, the collection of data, particularly on a statewide level along with relevant accurate reporting, rates poorly, as was experienced on more than one occasion. For example, it is highly concerning that the department has no idea if foster-carers have been charged with a criminal offence.

Once again at this year's estimates the minister admitted health passports and education support plans are still not being rolled out to all children in care and will not happen until 2010. A gross underspend on specialist counselling services means nearly 90 per cent of the state's sexually abused children receive no counselling at all. Whilst it is good to see that case loads have come down from 32 to an average of 21, there is a chance that untrained staff are handling some of them.

Attempts to whitewash a leaked report by the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, with claims that there were flaws in the research methodology, fly in the face of the commissioner's foreword which states—

There was no evidence of compliance by the Department of Child Safety with each of the required steps in any one placement decision.

This is the same minister, who was happy with that level of compliance, who said in reply to a question about children as young as 12 having contraceptive implants inserted that 'accessing contraception is not always an indication that a child is being harmed or at risk of harm'. She also said that she does 'not believe it is the role of politicians to be delving into private issues with respect to young children in care'.

This is the first budget that sees early intervention strategies included in the Child Safety portfolio statement. During previous years ministers have washed their hands—

Time expired.