



Speech by

**Rachel Nolan**

**MEMBER FOR IPSWICH**

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

**Ms NOLAN** (Ipswich—ALP) (11.43 a.m.): It was my privilege to chair Estimates Committee A, a committee in which all the participants conducted themselves with professionalism, dignity and good grace. For that I wish to thank our research director, Chris Garvey, and his team for their executive support. I also want to personally thank the committee members—deputy chair Lawrence Springborg and committee members Nita Cunningham, Carolyn Male, Craig Wallace, Mark McArdle and Ray Hopper.

The Speaker's estimates covered a range of issues from the morale of the parliamentary staff on whom we, as members, rely to the Speaker's continuing program to open up the parliament to the Queensland community and to recognise the state's early premiers. The media, however, in their commentary of Estimates Committee A chose to focus on the story of disappearing parliamentary cutlery, with the shocking revelation that about one per cent of the House's embossed silverware cannot be found. Many in the media, sadly, took it a step further, implying that while thousands of people pass through the doors of the parliament each year it is, in fact, the 89 state MPs who are knocking off the silver. No-one who was at the estimates hearing that day really believes that MPs are running around flogging cutlery. So the fact that this spin on the story became the main game for some in the media pack says nothing about the MPs but it says a great deal about the cynical cheap shots that too often pass for journalism around here. Our media feed a public perception that political standards have dropped, that MPs are greedy shysters in it for themselves and that we should hark back to some golden age of intelligent debate and statesmanlike leadership.

Before I go into it, I do want to recognise that it was not all in the media who ran this story about MPs knocking off the cutlery, but it certainly did get a run. The contrast that I want to make is this: one of the other things the Speaker touched on, other than talking about the cutlery, in his estimates discussion was his campaign to recognise the state's political history by commissioning a full set of portraits of early premiers. The second premier, as it turns out, was a member for Ipswich, Arthur Macalister. While Macalister is now honoured with a portrait in the parliament, has a street named after him in central Ipswich and has a very respectable place in history, he was in fact in his time regarded as an absolute rogue. He was known to his colleagues as Slippery Mac for his constantly shifting allegiances. In 1861 he even resigned his seat in a fit of pique but changed his mind and won it back at the subsequent by-election in 1862.

I would just ask members who are here, and the media as well, to pause for a moment and think about how one of us would get by if we tried on a stunt like that. The member would rightly be absolutely pilloried. The media would scream for the member to pay the cost of the by-election personally, and the public condemnation would be so strong that it would be unimaginable that the member would actually win their seat back.

So what has changed? What has changed is that MPs are now better educated, harder working, generally less safe in their seats and more legally and politically accountable than they have ever been before. But the other thing that has changed is the nature of our commentary. As politicians we are far from

perfect, and that is not, by any means, the point that I would be silly enough to try to make. Edmund Burke once said that all government is founded on compromise and banter, and in that sense absolutely nothing has changed. What has changed is the commentary of our political process. There is rampant cynicism that often passes for commentary of Queensland politics. This cynicism—the kind of cynicism that says, quite ridiculously, that MPs are running around knocking off teaspoons—is genuinely damaging to our democracy and it fundamentally demeans our political process. What it means, at the end of the day, is that people in the community believe not that standards are improving, not that we are, in many ways, more accountable than we have been in the past, but that, as I said, we are greedy shysters knocking off teaspoons and that we are in it for ourselves. That deeply harms public faith in our democracy and, in turn, it affects this government and other governments' ability to do what we are supposed to do, and that is represent and help people. That was what I took out of the Speaker's estimates committee.