



Speech by

Hon. D. WELLS

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Committee (Cognate Debate)

Estimates Committee F

Report No. 1

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (3.27 p.m.): Firstly, I thank the honourable member for Nudgee, the members of the committee and the staff of the committee for their superb work in respect of these Estimates. This is a great Education budget of \$3.46 billion. That is close enough to \$3,500m. This is a record budget. It is a budget in which the spending is above the national average, and it is the highest figure that has ever been spent on education in a single year in this jurisdiction.

This is a budget that has a number of significant features. It has an additional \$35m over four years for our Education for All program to provide for those with special needs. It is a budget of approximately an additional \$5m each year for literacy and numeracy. It is a budget of an additional \$5m per year for behaviour management. It is a budget that considerably enhances the capital works program above the levels that they would have otherwise been. It is a budget that will do a great deal for education in this State.

There is a dissenting report to the committee's report, and I would like to refer to it briefly. I thank the honourable member for Merrimac for his witty and erudite remarks earlier and the interesting paradoxes with which he presented us on the way through—like "more is less", "consultation is secrecy" and "transparency is opacity".

The honourable member for Merrimac was trying in his own witty and erudite way to persuade people that a record budget was, in fact, a budget of savage cuts. The fact that he managed to engage the Courier-Mail in that joke just shows what good humoured and fun-loving people they are there. The truth of the matter is that there were no cuts to any program in the Education Department. The honourable member for Merrimac has referred to the local area network service. \$13m is what we believe we will spend if we pay the bills as the work gets done as fast as we can get the work done. If we can get the work done faster than that, then we will pay more bills. If we get the work done less quickly, we will pay fewer bills. It is as simple as that. That was not a cut.

With respect to airconditioning, the member for Merrimac says that the Cooler Schools program will be delivered at a lesser cost per school than it was under the Government of his complexion. The dissenting report states that, if one adds up the funds allocated to all the schools and divides that figure by the number of the schools, one will find that the average cost is much less than the average funds that we have allocated for doing the rest of the schools. That is interesting arithmetic, but it neglects the considerable start-up costs for the airconditioning program. If one subtracts the start-up costs, takes into account the schools that we will be airconditioning in the new zone where there are fewer centres of major population concentration and divides by the right number, one will find that we have approximately the correct amount. I say to the honourable member for Merrimac and to honourable members generally that we will get that program going as fast as we can. If it costs a little more or a little less, we will pay those bills. We promise that we will pay the bills, because we have a budget for the bills that we pay.

The honourable member for Merrimac said in his dissenting report that there were cuts to the primary sector. That is not exactly true. \$26m was parked in the primary schools budget, but that \$26m came from the works budget in the previous year. That \$26m was all parked in there and it is now back in the works budget. It is still dedicated for Queensland schools. There is no less money in the primary sector. The ratios will remain the same in Years 1, 2, and 3. We will still have 25 students for one teacher, except that large numbers of additional people also will be making their appearance in the classroom as a result of our behaviour management programs, literacy and numeracy programs and the Education for All initiatives.

This is a spectacularly good Education budget. I am concerned that the members of the Queensland Council for Parents and Citizens are awaiting a response. They are being advised that they will be fully briefed next week and they will have all their questions answered.
