



Speech by

KAREN STRUTHERS

MEMBER FOR ARCHERFIELD

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Committee (Cognate Debate)

Estimates Committee F

Report No. 1

Ms STRUTHERS (Archerfield—ALP) (3.06 p.m.): I firstly wish to express my support of the Budget Estimates process. This is an essential accountability tool and one that the Parliament must have in order to restore and retain public confidence in the Parliament. In my former life as the Assistant Director of the Queensland Council of Social Service, I can recall sitting in on a number of Budget Estimates hearings. Many expenditure items were revealed that the public would not normally hear about. I certainly think it is important that, in the words of one of my infamous Labor colleagues or new Labor recruits, "We have to keep us bastards honest", and I think the Estimates process performs a vital role there. I also thank the committee support staff for its great work.

As I sat on Budget Estimates Committee F, I can recall feeling both greatly encouraged and greatly disturbed—greatly encouraged to hear more about the responsible Budget initiatives that our Government has introduced in the key portfolio areas and greatly disturbed to hear about some of the extravagant spending of the former coalition Government. On the encouraging side, I am pleased to be part of a Government that is tackling unemployment head on, rather than relying solely on an unpredictable, self-serving market to deliver jobs.

I was encouraged to hear the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations report on much-needed employment initiatives. These include the establishment of a Workplace Strategies Unit to provide labour market research to support policy on employment growth, job security and related areas. \$104m has been allocated to job placements and has been budgeted for over a four-year period to achieve 9,000 job placements through the Community Jobs Plan and Community Employment Assistance Plan.

We have heard a lot about our initiatives in regard to apprenticeships and traineeships. \$15m over three years has been allocated to provide \$2,000 cash bonus incentives to private sector employers or group training schemes to employ apprentices in industries suffering skill shortages. In addition, \$144m will be provided for public sector apprenticeships and traineeships. I will certainly be working hard to make sure that people in my area benefit from these initiatives. Despite ongoing criticism from members on the other side of the House, we are already getting on with the job.

I am also delighted that \$4m has been allocated to my home turf for the Construction Training Centre at Salisbury to complete road work and administration facilities. This will have the centre fully operational very shortly. I grew up in Salisbury, near the centre, and I know first-hand the difficulties that people had when it was the site of the Evans Deakin engineering works. Many of my friends' fathers lost their jobs during the 1970s and early 1980s, and it is both ironic and very positive that this site is now being used as a construction skill centre.

Estimates Committee F heard that, in the Education portfolio, \$40m will be spent on addressing numeracy and literacy in schools, that an additional \$2.5m has been allocated to behaviour management and that 685 additional teachers would be employed this year. These are all positive initiatives to secure the futures of our children.

I referred earlier to some of the disturbing things that I heard during the hearing for Estimates Committee F, firstly in regard to the training initiatives of the former coalition Government. The Minister, Mr Braddy, revealed that, far from 1997 being the Year of Training, 1997 was more like the year of training those already in training or those already in jobs. The Minister noted that far too much money was spent on paper qualifications for existing workers and not on unemployed people or new workers. As at 30 June 1998, 2,317 of the 2,717 trainees employed in the State Government were existing workers who were converted to trainees.

The previous Government abolished many employment programs, totalling in excess of \$16m. Those programs included many that were providing great support to young people, such as the YES program, a network of youth employment coordinators around the State, the Self-Employment Venture Scheme, the local employment and enterprise facilitation project and others. This \$16m cut, combined with the Howard Government's savage cut of \$1.8 billion from labour market programs, has meant that young unemployed people particularly have had little hope of getting work. In addition, we heard that the previous Government extensively downsized the department, with in excess of 500 voluntary early redundancies, totalling more than \$21.5m. There was a range of excesses there. I do not think the former Minister has much to be proud of.

In relation to Education, things were a little better. There was some excessive spending in the Leading Schools program, lots of conference money and other things and, overall, not a great deal to be proud of. Our Government will not be extravagant. We are committed to our jobs target and we are on track to achieve it.
