



Speech by

Mrs E. CUNNINGHAM

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Committee (Cognate Debate)

Estimates Committee C

Report

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—IND) (5.10 p.m.): As I am sure other speakers have done, I acknowledge the cooperative spirit of Estimates Committee C, the work of the Chair and the cooperation of the Ministers throughout the hearings. A couple of matters were raised during the hearings that I wish to comment on. During the hearing into the Public Works and Housing portfolio, we dealt with the matter of Government employee housing and the fact that upgrades are proposed for a number of houses in Queensland. Gladstone is one of the few areas that has retained Government housing for employees, but not without good cause.

Mr Swarten interjected.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: Yes. We have a very dynamic population. When a big industry comes in, the margin for rental housing disappears altogether. Tenants have even been evicted by landowners because the rental levels go up so markedly. The owners remove the tenants and put somebody else in for \$30, \$40 or \$50 more a week.

Mr Swarten: Hundreds.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: That is right. It is important to retain housing for Government employees, particularly during the high cycle. When the rental market has a 3% margin, it does not matter, but in peak periods of construction and industrial development things get very difficult. That will continue. There is a cyclical effect that will certainly not disappear.

An issue that I raise with what some might regard is monotonous regularity is the millennium bug. However, this is an important issue. This was the only Estimates hearing that I sat in on—

Mr Swarten: What about the group apprenticeship scheme?

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: That is coming. It is important that all departments be ready. Only one department representative specifically raised concerns about the bug, and I am pleased that he did that. I am pleased that the Minister gave him the freedom to make those comments. That was in the area of public works, particularly in relation to the hospitals that may not be millennium bug proofed yet.

Mrs Lavarch: We may not even be millennium bug proofed.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: That is a worry in itself. Considering the critical role that hospitals play in public health, if that system is not prepared the impact on patients and their families will be significant. Again I thank the Minister for allowing his officers the freedom to be as candid as they were. The other departments indicated that they were fine. We have to be vigilant about this and we are running out of time in which to make ourselves ready. Within the State, we should be showing private as well as public enterprise that we are ready for the challenge of the new millennium.

The Minister expected that I would raise the issue of the group apprenticeship scheme, and I do so now. In discussions, the Minister has indicated his support for the allocation of houses for group

apprentices and I thank him for that. In my discussions with him, he has been very positive. I look forward to that support being transferred into a tangible document that will allocate the houses that are necessary for a concrete training program for the life of an apprentice's indenture. That has not occurred yet, but as I said to date the Minister has been very supportive

In the area of Transport and Main Roads, one of the chestnuts in my area is Monto Road. We did not get down to the details in the Estimates hearing because I had already spoken with members of the Minister's department about the Monto Road. The other night a public meeting was held on the issue. The meeting was less heated than the previous meeting that was held to discuss capital allocations. The people have agreed that bitumen works will be a priority on the southern end of the road unless there are safety issues that take precedent. People from both the north and the south appeared to be happy with that proposal. That is quite an achievement in itself.

The tilt trains were discussed and I pass on to the Minister my appreciation for the press release that he issued some weeks ago on the development of the tilt train. This is not a big issue for city dwellers, but country people who use the diesel trains were concerned that the tilt train would pass through their stations without stopping. Those people are least able to access the major stations in order to catch the train. It was confirmed that when bookings are made at one of the stations in my electorate, Mount Larcom—and I am sure that this is replicated up and down the eastern seaboard—the tilt train will stop and pick up passengers. In the urban areas, people can catch suburban trains to the major stations, but places like Mount Larcom are isolated. Confirmation that the tilt train will stop at such places has caused a lot of confidence to be returned to the community. I thank the Minister for that.

Revenue from speed cameras was an issue that, rather than going to consolidated revenue should be——

Time expired.
