



Speech by

Mr N. ROBERTS

MEMBER FOR NUDGEE

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Committee (Cognate Debate)

Estimates Committee F

Report No. 1

Mr ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (2.56 p.m.): As Chairman of Estimates Committee F, I take this opportunity to thank my fellow committee members for their contributions during the Estimates committee process. In particular, I thank the committee secretariat staff for their professional advice and assistance, particularly during the preparation of the report. Their work certainly paved the way for a smooth operation of the committee and also, as I have noted, the preparation of the report. I make particular mention of research director Ms Megan Collins and also Veronica Rogers and Mandy Elcome. I thank also Hansard and other parliamentary staff for their professional assistance on the day of the hearing.

With respect to the two portfolios within Estimates Committee F, which were Employment, Training and Industrial Relations and Education, I simply note at the outset that it was pleasing to see significant increases in budgets for both portfolios. With respect to Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, that increase was in the order of 18%. With respect to Education, the increase was in the order of 5% on the 1997-98 Estimates.

There was one significant area of disappointment in relation to this Estimates committee, and that was the content of the statement of reservations provided by the member for Clayfield, which in my view has unduly politicised the committee's report. After asserting in his statement of reservations that the Minister had politicised the process, the member then went on to make probably the most political statement of all the statements of reservations attached to committee reports in this year's Estimates process.

I wish to make a few comments on some of the more significant issues arising from the Industrial Relations portfolio in particular. In relation to employment initiatives, it is very clear that the Budget has the issue of job creation as its central platform. The Premier and the Minister for Employment have stated on a number of occasions that they are both obsessed about the issue of job creation, and it is pleasing to see such a heavy emphasis on job creation initiatives in this Budget. For example, \$283m will go towards facilitating the creation of 24,500 additional apprenticeships, traineeships and job placements. Also of significance is the requirement that 10% of the employment on Government capital works projects be allocated to apprentices.

I just want to comment briefly on some of the consultation currently taking place within the community on job creation. I participated in an employment forum recently at the Kedron-Wavell Services Club, which was attended by over 50 local businesspeople and representatives from training organisations and also community organisations. I was most encouraged by the active participation of the community representatives in that forum. The discussion focused heavily on identifying barriers to employment creation and also identifying employment opportunities within our region. The Minister and his department are to be congratulated on initiating that consultative forum, and hopefully it will be a feature which will continue into the future.

The other issue I might touch on arising from the Budget papers on the subject of industrial relations is in relation to the reform of the industrial relations system, an area which is dear to my heart

given my previous life as an industrial advocate for the Electrical Trades Union. It is important, in my view, that we move from an industrial relations system that is currently based on individual contracts, on individual conflict pitting worker against worker and worker against employer in an unequal bargaining situation. We must move to a situation in which there is more fairness and equity. During recent debates in this Parliament, I was disappointed that we were not successful in abolishing QWAs. I hope that one day this Parliament takes that significant step to restore some proper balance to the power relationships that exist between employers and employees.

The other area that I want to comment on in relation to industrial relations reform is the current provisions relating to section 293, or the old section 45 of the Act, which allow for predatory behaviour both by trade unions and employers in demarking coverage of union members to a particular union. I have strong views on this particular provision in the legislation as I have had direct experience with its consequences. In my view, it should be an area of significant debate and hopefully significant amendment in any future industrial relations legislation.

The other issue that I will make brief mention of is——

Time expired.
