



Speech by

**Hon. R. SCHWARTEN**

**MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON**

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Hansard 21 October 1998

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Committee (Cognate Debate)**

**Estimates Committee C**

**Report**

**Hon. R. E. SCHWARTEN** (Rockhampton— ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing) (5.15 p.m.): I thank honourable members for their comments. I place on record my thanks to the Chair of the committee and, indeed, to all members of the committee for what turned out to be a very useful Estimates procedure. As Ministers, the valuable thing that we get out of that procedure is the opportunity to explore various items that do not always come to a Minister's desk and do not always pop into a Minister's head. I welcome the opportunity of placing the entire finances and policies of the department before the Parliament.

The previous speaker, the member for Gladstone, raised a couple of issues that are dear to my heart, not the least of which is the HIP scheme and the problems that we have had previously in making it more useful in the training of apprentices. The point that has been made to the member for Gladstone, myself and, no doubt, to other honourable members is that it is very difficult to give a commitment to an apprentice that they will be able to serve their time unless one has a clear indication of how many houses are going to be built. My aim is to get a four-year program together. All honourable members would be aware that the problem is that that runs over the term of a Government, but I do not think that that is an insurmountable problem; it is just something that has not been done before. The Department of Main Roads certainly has a five-year planning program and I cannot see why we cannot tie it into this program.

I give this commitment: within the next couple of weeks, the department will be in a position to nominate exactly how many houses will go to each group apprenticeship scheme next year. The member's friends in Gladstone, mine in Rockhampton and others in Mackay or wherever will have a clear indication of exactly how many houses they will have to build over the next 12 months. They will be able to plan on that basis. Then we will get cracking on rolling that program out.

**Ms Boyle:** And that means jobs.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** It does indeed mean jobs. The member for Mansfield mentioned the fact that this year Q-Build will employ 50 new apprentices, which is a quite an achievement in itself. To retain the tradesperson per apprentice ratio, we will have to keep approximately 40 on. Some of those apprentices will be plumbers who previously were excluded after they had finished their fourth year. We will keep them for their fifth year so that they can get a licence and be much more employable. Governments should do that to make people more employable at the end of their contracts.

I see our responsibility as primarily being a training agency and Q-Build does that very well. The sort of work that Q-Build does is not necessarily the sort of work that is picked up by the private sector, especially in renovation work and the sort of stuff that I started working on. They do a very intensive training course and I am very proud to be associated with it. I am very proud to be able to stand in the House today and say that we will employ those extra apprentices and that 140 kids who have not got jobs at the moment will have just that in the next couple of months.

The member for Gregory raised the issue of housing, which I think we could all get behind. As I indicated this morning, the houses at Blackwater have come about as a quirk of nature. The mining

companies entered into an arrangement with the Queensland Government when they were building those houses. The houses are now progressively coming back to us as the accommodation leasing situation is rationalised. We could put all of those houses on the market and have a big auction, but I do not think that that would help the real estate market in Queensland, especially when local authorities in such places are looking for extra houses for their workers and are trying to help sustain population growth in their areas.

The member for Gladstone mentioned the millennium bug. I am advised reliably that there is enough cash in the bucket to deal with the problem. It may need some internal reallocation of funds, but I am advised that that will occur.

We have a housing budget of approximately \$588m this year and I am pleased that we have been able to increase the budget by not handing back some \$30m to John Howard and his mob. Over the last couple of years, we have given back \$130-odd million.

Time expired.

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