



Speech by

VAUGHAN JOHNSON

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Hansard 22 October 1998

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Committee (Cognate Debate)

Estimates Committee E

Report

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (2.30 p.m.): It gives me pleasure to join in the debate on the report of Estimates Committee E. In relation to the Health Estimates, I endorse the comments that the member for Fitzroy made about the mental health facility at the Emerald Hospital. I pay tribute to the former Health Minister, Mike Horan, for the great work that he did in putting together that hospital. After six Labor Budgets, in the two and a quarter years of the coalition Government, we saw that hospital in Emerald put in place. I congratulate Mike Horan on that effort. I also make mention of the support that Jimmy Pearce, the member for Fitzroy, gave me in lobbying for that mental health facility at the Emerald Hospital.

However, I want to speak to the Estimates of the Minerals and Energy portfolio. Just this week in this Chamber I asked the Minister about power in western Queensland. I refer to the Barcoo and Boulia Shires. The Minister made mention of \$5m being in the Borbidge/Sheldon Budget that was not signed off. There is \$1m in this Budget for that same program. Last Tuesday, in answer to my question in this place, the Minister said that he has put in place an Office of Sustainable Energy, which will look at putting power into rural and remote Queensland. That is an absolute waste of money: \$10m to again create more Public Service jobs when we could be giving power to people in rural and remote Queensland who only ever dream of it.

There are people in the cities throughout the length and breadth of this State who take power for granted. This morning, a young mother and I met with the Premier's Parliamentary Secretary, Mr Nuttall. I am very thankful to him for giving us his time. That young mother has three little boys aged between five and one. She referred to one occasion when her husband was away, all three kids were sick at the one time and in the middle of the night, with no generator going, she was trying to clean up vomit and what have you with a torch. These are the circumstances under which these people live.

I say to members opposite that they should show some compassion and show some understanding of the cause. The Minister talks about \$93m. The former Goss Labor Government should never have corporatised the power industry in this State and instead got on with the job of putting power in some of these places. We should forget about the dollar cost; we should think of the human cost. We should show some compassion and give these people in rural areas the quality of life that they deserve.

In relation to my own electorate, I congratulate Pacific Coal on its purchase of Arco's share of the Gordonstone mine. Yesterday, Pacific Coal purchased its 80% share. I salute Pacific Coal/Rio Tinto. It is fantastic news to know that that mine is going to be fully operational again by mid next year. The work force, which is currently 450, will be taken up to some 800 when they get into full swing with all of their other operations, such as Hail Creek, coming on stream, too. I certainly wish Pacific Coal, in joint venture with Mitsui and MLC, the best of luck with Gordonstone. It is going to be fantastic to again get that great mine working and making Emerald, which is located in my electorate and which is a dormitory town for those coalmines, again functional for the miners and their families.

I hope and trust that the unions show some understanding and sense in their negotiations with the new owners. At the end of the day, the issue is productivity and maintaining a livelihood for the miners and their families. If the operation is kept going, the shareholders will be happy—everybody is going to be happy. There will be jobs, and that is what it is all about.

I also want to refer to the corporatisation of the power industry. I touched on this matter a while ago. The other thing that the Labor Government signed off on—and in recent months members opposite have been very vocal in slamming it—is the National Competition Policy. I say to those members opposite to be very, very careful about how they manage this regime from here on in, because this side of the Chamber will not support it in any way, shape or form. We have seen exactly how the National Competition Policy has destroyed rural and remote Queensland, not only in the area of main roads, for which I was Minister, but also in the power industry. I believe that we have to see in this State the decorporatisation of these public utilities so that the Government can take control and give the people the benefits that they deserve to receive, whether it is power or whatever else.

Time expired.
