



Speech by

Hon. ANNA BLIGH

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

Hansard 28 October 1999

**APPROPRIATION BILL
Estimates Committee G
Report**

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services) (3.59 p.m.): I am pleased to speak to the report of Estimates Committee G. I thank the committee chair, members of the committee and committee staff, particularly research director David Thannhauser, for their hard work and organisation of the Estimates committee process this year.

The 1999-2000 Budget Estimates process has afforded me an opportunity to highlight the significant reform that has been accomplished in the previous budget and outline the continuation of reform in some shamefully neglected areas, such as child protection and disability services. This reform and rebuilding of a system that had been abandoned by members opposite has been accomplished in partnership with the community. I take this opportunity to recognise the important contribution of our non-Government partners over the past year and to thank all officers of my department for their hard work and dedication to change over the past 12 months, particularly my director-general, Mr Ken Smith, and staff of the Finance Branch in their preparation of material for the Estimates. Thanks also go to the staff of my ministerial office in this regard.

It is because Labor cares that we injected an unparalleled budgetary increase into the disability services sector and the child protection areas of my portfolio. Because we are about delivering, we will ensure that funds are distributed equitably and fairly. The member for Indooroopilly asked a question on notice of Estimates Committee G in relation to funding by electoral boundaries. He did not ask any questions about this material at Estimates Committee G, but he has come in here this afternoon and has tried to make some obscure political point. I would like to make the point that we distribute funds on the basis of need and not on the basis of electoral boundaries. The coalition cared so little that it did not even bother to find out how many Queenslanders needed support in areas such as disability services. We have built a system from the ground up and laid a foundation for a fairer system in the future.

The priorities for my department this year include the care and protection of children who come into care and those who come into contact with the youth justice system. In the area of child protection, the Government has committed \$100m over the next four years to increase the State's capacity to care for children who are at risk of coming into our care or who are already in our care. This money will be used to boost the front line of our department's work by 250 workers over the four years and provide better resources for service providers supporting abused and neglected children and their families.

The shadow Minister has tried to make much of the staffing figures in this regard. There is no doubt that he is either unable to add up or unable to understand the changing nature of a large and complicated work force. Seventy positions were advertised nationally on the weekend after Estimates Committee G. There was huge interest, and I am pleased to report that we have received over 400 phone calls seeking information about the positions.

In the area of youth justice, the Forde inquiry outlined significant need for reform based on an urgent upgrading and replacement of Queensland's youth detention facilities. On this issue, as I have said on many occasions, members opposite should hang their heads in shame. Once again we see a

history of promises to spend up big and construct better detention facilities, but no political will to deliver on this commitment.

To date, we have spent over \$3m in just 12 months in comparison to the previous Government's spending of \$4,000 over three Budgets. We have spent 800 times more in 12 months than the coalition spent in two and a half years. This is just the beginning of our 10-year \$63m youth detention infrastructure plan. A crucial part of the youth justice infrastructure plan is the closure of the outdated and inadequate Sir Leslie Wilson Youth Detention Centre at Windsor. This was another commitment where the previous Government failed. Why?

Perhaps the answer to that lies in the member for Indooroopilly's speech in the Budget debate in this Chamber on 16 September. I think it is important that honourable members know that the following words were actually said by the member for Indooroopilly, because I believe it was a disgraceful contribution. He stated that the Goss Government disposed of the State's best and major youth detention facility. The member could only be referring to the Westbrook youth detention facility at Toowoomba that was closed after 94 years of extreme violence, institutional cruelty and neglect of boys in care.

Yes, that institution was closed by the Goss Labor Government. It was a proud achievement of that Government. The Westbrook facility was the subject of a 1961 inquiry. There was another inquiry in 1994. The facility was again examined in detail by the Forde inquiry. I can only assume that the member for Indooroopilly failed to read the report of the Forde inquiry. Anybody who has read that report could not fail to be moved by the experiences of people who have been to Westbrook. The member has either not read it or he truly believes that Westbrook was a first-class facility and should be replicated. It is a disgraceful comment. All those who suffered in this facility are entitled to the support of all members of this Parliament. They are obviously not going to get that support from the member for Indooroopilly who, in my view, should apologise unreservedly to the past residents of that shameful place.

We have a long way to go in this portfolio, but much has been achieved and we have much to look forward to in the coming years. We will continue to get runs on the board where it counts.

Time expired.
