



Speech by

Mr S. ROBERTSON

MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK

Hansard 14 September 1999

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr ROBERTSON (Sunnybank—ALP) (11.40 a.m.): Before I talk about the important issue of small business in this State, I wish to record my feelings about the presentation of the member for Clayfield. It was an absolutely disgraceful attack on senior public servants in this State. What we have seen today is the development of a coalition hit list. And every person whom the member mentioned today should now believe that, if that mob ever come back to power, they will have absolutely no security of employment. This comes from the man who was the architect of the ethnic strategy at the last election, which did the deal with One Nation—an absolutely grubby deal. But it does not stop there, because one of his little foot soldiers, Michael Johnson, is currently in Ryan trying to knife a senior member of the coalition.

Mr Mickel: And using the Chinese to do it.

Mr ROBERTSON: Yes, he is using the Chinese to do it—the ethnic branch stack. That is an example of the continual, disgraceful and cynical politics which we have come to expect from the member for Clayfield. His presentation today demonstrated just how low this man will go to denigrate everyone who comes within his sights, without any apology for the hurt that he causes senior public servants and ethnic communities throughout Queensland.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): Order! Those members who are conducting conversations across the Chamber should continue outside the Chamber.

Mr ROBERTSON: And the continuing work that the member for Clayfield does in cynically manipulating the ethnic communities in this State for narrow political purposes has not gone unnoticed. Together with his mate Michael Johnson, there is no-one he will not chop on his own side of politics to achieve what he wants. I assure him that I am not worried one iota. Any time he wants to come to Sunnybank, come on down! I will make sure that he is run out of town as soon as he gets there.

I want to speak today about small business. Last week, I visited a number of major regional centres to promote the wide range of services, advice and assistance available to small business through the Queensland Government's State Development Centres. The Department of State Development is the focal point for business in its dealings with the Queensland Government. It was created to bring all functions of Government as they concern business into one department in order to give business complete service in much less time.

The welfare and development of small to medium sized business is an essential aspect of the department's activities and a priority for the Beattie Government. It would not be otherwise in a State with more than 190,000 small to medium sized businesses. These are businesses with fewer than 20 employees, although they account for more than 97% of all businesses in Queensland. Such operations employ some 52.1% of all private sector employees in the State and have been pivotal to job creation. I notice that, as he usually does, the member for Clayfield is scampering away.

Of the 425,000 net jobs created in Australia in 1996-97, 94% were created by small and medium sized operators, and about half of these jobs were created by micro businesses employing five people or less. It is therefore not difficult to understand that future job creation in Queensland will continue to be focused on small business opportunities. Those facts demonstrate why the Beattie

Government's commitment to this sector is so unequivocal. A more significant voice for regional Queensland in business development is of equally high priority.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr ROBERTSON: The member for Toowoomba South should listen to this, because he needs to know something about small business.

The Beattie Government believes that the State's regions offer Australia's best business opportunities. Through its 15 State Development Centres, the department provides small and medium sized businesses with a wide range of advice and other services and assistance. A large proportion of such organisations in Queensland are exporters. And here again, the services of the department are available to regional small business through our State Development Centres. They provide direct access to our eight international trade and investment offices, which will be increased to nine when a new office opens in Osaka, Japan later this year. Understandably, most of these offices are located in Asia, which is the destination for more than 60% of Queensland's exports. They are able to provide invaluable on-the-spot data about our most important trading partners—information that is disseminated throughout Queensland via our State Development Centres.

We have augmented our capacity in this field via new initiatives, such as international business diversity summits, where we provide networking opportunities for established businesses to meet business migrants who retain significant business contacts in their countries of origin. We are expanding these summits by taking them into regional areas. In fact, in November, the first regional international business diversity summit will be held in Cairns, focusing on opportunities in the food industry. I contrast that with the activities of the member for Clayfield with respect to ethnic business communities. What is amply demonstrated is our commitment to ensuring that these business migrants, when they come to Queensland, are provided with every opportunity to expand businesses and create jobs in Queensland, not enrolled in some cynical political activities in which the member for Clayfield has become a master.

In November 1998, we launched the Queensland Industry Development Scheme, or QIDS—a \$30m, four-year initiative to assist businesses to grow and develop new markets. For the 107 firms assisted between November last year and 30 June this year, projected outcomes are expected over the next three years of some 2,109 new jobs and 1,872 jobs retained, \$290.2m in export and domestic sales generated and \$134.1m in new investment.

During my visit to Cairns, Townsville, Gladstone and Bundaberg, I was able to see at first-hand how the QIDS program is helping small and medium businesses to grow and compete in domestic and world markets. Companies such as Bundaberg Brewed Drinks and Australian Aloe in Bundaberg will use QIDS to expand their export markets. Companies like Bulkabags in Townsville will use QIDS to install new machinery to expand the quality of the service they can offer their clients. And Austicks in Gladstone will use QIDS to fight off expected competition from China by continually upgrading its facility to manufacture higher quality product.

We also launched Asia Link in November 1998 to provide a 30% rebate on travel to Asia by Queensland exporters. By the end of June, 47 applications, valued at almost \$200,000, had been approved, with expected outcomes over three years of \$28m in export sales and \$11m in new investment. The department also has approved 33 applications, valued at \$1.2m, under the Queensland Trade Assistance Scheme, and export income of at least \$50m over the next three years from a total of \$2.5m in such funding is anticipated.

Export development is one of the Beattie Government's highest priorities, along with regional development. Indeed, we believe regional Queensland offers export-oriented businesses great opportunities, and the Government has implemented some very important initiatives in this field. The Queensland Regional Business Advisory Service has been established, at a cost of some \$2.64m over three years, to provide a network of regional business and economic advisers in remote areas of the State. The Regional Business Development Scheme is designed to assist companies and regional groups to identify opportunities that facilitate Queensland's regional economic development. And small to medium business also is encompassed in some of our broader objectives. It is important that all Queensland businesses embrace the concept of innovation as basic to their wellbeing. Innovation is a major driver of international competitiveness, economic growth and sustainable job creation.

As I said earlier today, the department recently released a draft strategy document titled Innovation—Queensland's Future. That document's recommendations will soon be considered by Cabinet after feedback has been received. The Queensland Innovation Council is proposed, and it will influence the development and implementation of Queensland Government initiatives in science and technology. The strategy is aimed at fostering innovation and technology diffusion across all sectors of industry, while encouraging an innovative culture throughout the general community. That strategy also adopts a regional focus through the development and planning of strategic initiatives by our State Development Centres. Local promotion of regional events will be coordinated to raise community and industry awareness and to develop and expand local industry. A skills enhancement initiative for

regional field officers is also planned, designed to boost assistance to local firms in accessing funding and advice. The development and growth of knowledge-intensive industries is vital to our future development. Queensland is well placed to take advantage of opportunities in IT, biotechnology and the electronics, aviation and space industries.

One of the important activities of the Queensland Small Business Advisory Council, which I chair, is assisting Queensland small business to cope with the introduction of the GST. To that end, having commissioned a report, we have put forward a range of proposals to assist small businesses through services which will be provided by our State Development Centres and which will be a topic of further speeches in this place in the months to come.

Time expired.
