



Speech by

WARREN PITT

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

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APPROPRIATION BILL

Estimates Committee D

Report

Mr PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (5.05 p.m.): It is with pleasure that I speak this afternoon to the report of Estimates Committee D. At the outset, my appreciation is extended to research officer Rob McBride and executive assistant Jane Olsen who did an excellent job throughout the whole process. Similarly, I thank Hansard for their efforts on the day of the hearing.

Overall, an air of cooperation from members of the committee drawn from both sides of the Chamber made my task as chairman a relatively easy one. As I understand it, there is no dissenting report. I view this as a vote of confidence in the system and the achievements of the committee. It is an endorsement of the professional manner in which the Ministers and departments under scrutiny have discharged their responsibilities to this Parliament and to the people of Queensland.

The members for Keppel, Barron River, Toowoomba North, Mansfield, Warrego—and the member for Nerang, who also participated—approached their task with diligence, goodwill and good humour. Ministers Mackenroth, Gibbs and Welford and officers of their respective departments provided members of the committee with full and frank answers, assisting the work of the committee to that extent.

Today I wish to confine my remarks to the means by which the Government is facilitating access to its information and services. This is of particular importance in regional and rural communities. I think that Governments of all political colours across Australia have been delivered a very clear and unequivocal message which is reflective of the disillusionment and alienation of significant sections of the community. I believe that the recent Victorian election results are another indication of that.

In response to the need for Government to reconnect with its constituency, the Beattie Government has established a process of regional consultation on a scale not seen elsewhere in any other Australian State. Over the months of February/March this year, 4,580 Queenslanders availed themselves of the opportunity to attend one of eight regional community conferences across the State. Attendees were able to raise regional issues and, more importantly, they were offered the opportunity to come up with local solutions to local problems. I believe that any of us who live outside the metropolitan area have frequently argued that quite often some of the best solutions do not emanate from the metropolitan area. Quite often, local people have very practical solutions to problems which are seen in a different light from their end of the world.

As a result, significant investment has been made in progressing the establishment of an ongoing process to more closely involve the community in the whole process of Government. The Government has put in place eight ministerial regional community forums, each of which has 20 members drawn from a wide range of sectoral interest groups. To service these forums, eight regional communities offices were opened and adequately resourced.

The success of the Beattie Government's initiative is already evident. Attendance at regional forums remains high, with feedback mechanisms ensuring that participants are kept fully informed of progress made on issues raised. I have no doubt that we have successfully begun the long process of effectively re-engaging with communities which Governments are elected to serve.

I would like to look briefly at the other program which was of great interest to me. I refer to the QGAP program. In 1998-99, this program had 50 centres throughout Queensland and is projected to move to 61 centres—an increase of 11—over the next 12 months. The QGAP sites are reliant, to a large extent nowadays, on electronic mechanisms of communication, namely having the ability to access the Internet. I understand that in 1998-99 it was estimated that 10% would be fully outfitted. That figure was exceeded because 26% of them were on line. The aim for the year 1999-2000 is to have 30% of those offices on line. Living in regional or remote parts of Queensland should not debar individuals from having access to the full range of Government services. If we are the Smart State that we claim to be, we should be able to put that technology to good use.

The need for QGAP centres arose out of the Government's decision to close courthouses. Whilst a lot of people accepted the need to close courthouses because they had outlived their purpose, the need to access Government services in those communities did not diminish; as a matter of fact, it has grown over the years. When we put these QGAP offices in place we returned to people the opportunity to access the whole range of Government services.

Time expired.
