



Speech by

Mr DOUG SLACK

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard 24 August 2000

APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E

Mr SLACK (Burnett—NPA) (11.56 a.m.): I thank the member for Woodridge for his lesson to members of the Opposition. I note it; I do not necessarily agree with it, while I may agree with some points that he made during his contribution. I compliment the chairman on the time that she did afford to members—

Mr Kaiser: More than fair.

Mr SLACK: Yes, it was fair and it was in that spirit that we entered into the Estimates debate. However, I am disappointed in the comments that she did make in respect of the reservation statements that were put forward by the members of the Opposition. I acknowledge, and I am sure that all members of the Opposition acknowledge, that the Estimates debate does afford members of the Opposition the chance to put forward their points in respect of policy issues.

Mr Kaiser: You just didn't do it very well.

Mr SLACK: I will not take the interjection because we have got a different point of view. If the member stopped to listen for a moment he might learn something, because he acknowledged that he is only new to the process, having participated in only one Estimates process. The member for Cairns is giving the impression that she is new to the process as well. Where I was disappointed in her contribution as chairman is that she was not asked to act as adjudicator. The person who has the responsibility to reply to the reservation statements is the Premier or the relevant Minister. It is in their court. It is not for the member for Cairns to make observations on the Opposition's points at issue.

It is fair to say that in Estimates committees political points are made by both sides of politics. The member for Capalaba, the Deputy Premier, was no exception. In fact, he was short on detail. That is why we have these five minute speeches, to afford members the opportunity to comment on those issues where we felt the Ministers being questioned had shortcomings.

The issue that was raised by the chairman, about which I put in a reservation statement, about overseas students is justified. There was no mention in the budget of an allocation of an amount of money specifically for overseas student promotion. It is a big issue in this State because the number of overseas students coming here determines the business connections we will have with those countries in the future and it determines the tourist numbers. Those students go back into their political arena and their business arena. It is all pluses. The numbers have been deteriorating. It is natural for me—

Ms Boyle interjected.

Mr SLACK: They are deteriorating in terms of the percentage of the cake. I take the member's point.

Ms Boyle interjected.

Mr SLACK: The member should just hang on and let me make my point. The numbers are deteriorating in respect of the overall numbers of people coming to Australia. I accept that, and I accepted that at the time. The reality is that, although the numbers have been increasing, the numbers coming to Queensland have been deteriorating. It is natural for the Opposition to be concerned about that and question the Minister about it, because the Minister has the responsibility. He acknowledged that responsibility in his department to coordinate the promotion of Queensland as a venue for

overseas students. It is natural that I am concerned about the deterioration in the figures. The member for Cairns should also be concerned that the percentage of the overall number drops from 17% to 15.1%, if my figures are correct. It is fine for the Minister to quote the extra numbers who are coming to this country, but that was not the point of the question. There was a shortcoming in the Minister not giving the amount of money that been allocated in this Budget to address that issue.

I was disappointed in the issues surrounding the office of the Auditor-General. As the member for Nerang pointed out, the Auditor-General is an officer of this Parliament, and he has genuine concerns about his budget. In no way would we like to see constraints on the Auditor-General's budget in terms of him doing his job as an officer of the Parliament, and I say that as a member of Parliament. I make the point that in past Estimates committees officers of the Parliament have answered questions. On this occasion, the Premier chose to answer the questions and initially did not give the Auditor-General an opportunity to speak about the concerns that he had in relation to his budget.

I naturally asked questions about other issues, such as the Timor issue. That is of concern to us, because we had received information that genuine companies had not been able to get the support of the Government in their efforts in East Timor. However, an issue that is particularly concerning to me is this Government quoting a figure of 64% of the budget for capital works being allocated outside the Brisbane statistical division. I would like some clarification as to whether that 64% includes the Moreton division. Are we comparing like allocations in this budget with previous budgets? I believe that we are not. The evidence is that we are not.

Time expired.
