



Speech by

SHAUN NELSON

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

Hansard 23 August 2000

APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (2.56 p.m.): Unfortunately, I cannot agree with what the Minister has just said in his speech, because the SES personnel in my electorate are coming to me and telling me the exact opposite. The speech that the Minister just read is basically exactly the same one that he read at the start of the Estimates committee hearing. He tries to claim that the Beattie Government is giving full and unfettered support to the SES. If that is the case, then why are SES controllers throughout my electorate and far-north Queensland coming to me and saying that this is not so? In particular, some of the points that were raised with me in my discussions with them—

Mr Robertson: I'm prepared to give you a full briefing and to address those particular concerns.

Mr NELSON: I do not need a full briefing. I would rather talk to SES people on the ground than listen to the Minister's point of view. The Minister is probably not—

Mr Robertson: They're not shared by the rest of the State, by the way.

Mr NELSON: Mr Chairman, I will wait for your protection, whenever you are ready. Unfortunately, I do not think the Minister is getting the full story from his department, because the situation that I have had—

Mr Barton: All we get from you is stories.

Mr NELSON: Has the Minister quite finished? I could have a go at him, too. He is probably one of the most ineffectual Police Ministers we have ever had. Suffice to say that the Beattie Government's main peg on which it is trying to hang its hat at the moment is that it has given the SES a director. But the simple fact is that this is a director without any real power to change anything within his department.

The other problem is that the whole coordinating start of the SES is being changed to something called CDRS. In my electorate, when a cyclone hits—of course, we do not have many cyclones hit Sunnybank, wherever that may be—and when the rivers are flooding—

Mr Barton: They don't hit Mareeba, either.

Mr NELSON: A cyclone has never hit Mareeba? Is the Minister sure about that? Through you, Mr Chairman, is the Minister quite sure that a cyclone has never hit Mareeba? I can assure him that I was in Mareeba when a cyclone hit. I was there and I saw it come over. The Minister might like to consult some other members from north Queensland. The member for Mulgrave is shaking his head, because he knows for a fact that a cyclone hit Mareeba last year. That shows how in touch the Minister is. He would not have a clue. The last time he went to north Queensland was on some sort of quick road trip. He would not have a clue what goes on up there. It shows how much he knows about his portfolio in the area as well, because the police were very heavily involved in the rescue services after that cyclone. Best the Minister get on the phone and talk to them.

The simple fact is that, when a cyclone hits my area, people do not get on the phone and say, "Oh, we had better look for the CDRS." They call the SES. The SES should be the premier service when it comes to that, because it is the people in the orange uniforms who are on the streets picking up the rubbish and looking after the destruction.

Mr Robertson: You've been misinformed.

Mr NELSON: I have not been misinformed, because this comes from people within the system. The Minister is the one who has been misinformed, because he is a clown and he has no idea what he is talking about. He took over from—

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN (Mr Reeves): Order!

Mr NELSON: Mr Chairman, you call me to order but you don't call Government members to order.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: Order!

Mr NELSON: What are you going to do?

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: That is a reflection on the Chair.

Mr NELSON: My oath it is!

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: I ask the member to withdraw it.

Mr NELSON: I withdraw.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN: I remind the member for Tablelands to speak through the Chair.

Mr NELSON: Mr Chairman, through you—this portfolio was run by a Minister who had the support of the SES and who actually looked after the portfolio. It has been handed on to somebody who has no idea what they are doing and has obviously set out on some sort of rogue agenda that has been set up by the department, because he obviously has no idea about emergency services. It is quite unfortunate, because the people who are suffering are the people who actually do the work within the portfolio. The people who are suffering are the SES volunteers. I trust them emphatically and a thousand times more than I would trust anything that comes out of this Minister's department.

One example in the budget that I have been given is funding for 650 pairs of overalls for over 30,000 volunteers. That is something to be proud of! We have constantly heard how they have received \$1.5m. That amount of money can be allocated only once. If it is provided over a number of years, it is not an extra \$1.5m in funding.

The simple fact is that these volunteers provide an essential service, something that we could not possibly pay for if we had to pay them, but they are not getting the support that they need from the department. We do not need to change things to CDRS, whatever that may be, we need to keep the SES, and we need to improve its services and not try to funnel it off through some sort of departmental changes.

I know that all this is going to the Minister's office. I know that these complaints are being made to him. I ask him not to ignore them. I ask him to get out and talk to the people who count, the people who are at district level—

Mr Robertson interjected

Mr NELSON: The Minister does not, because these people are telling me that he does not. So is he misleading the Parliament or are they lying to me? Guess what, I know that they are not lying to me, so therefore it must be the Minister who is not telling the whole truth. I invite him up to Atherton to talk to the people up there—

Mr ROBERTSON: I rise to a point of order. I find that comment offensive and I ask that it be withdrawn.

Mr NELSON: I withdraw. I invite the Minister to come up to Atherton and speak to the people up there and maybe he might get a bit of education.

Time expired.
