



Speech by

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Hansard 2 August 2001

APPROPRIATION BILLS [ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F]

Ms STRUTHERS (Algeria—ALP) (3.01 p.m.): I valued the opportunity to chair Estimates Committee F. The committee scrutinised three areas essential to our Smart State future—education; employment, training and youth and the arts; and all those areas aimed at maintaining a fair and balanced industrial relations system. I thank all members of committee F for their cooperation on the committee and I thank Sarah Lim and other parliamentary staff for the smooth running of the hearing process.

The budget estimates process is a foundation for good accountable government. It is a very public forum for putting ministers in the hot seat so that their program expenditure is thoroughly examined. In my view, though, the public of Queensland was let down badly by the opposition members on Estimates Committee F. Their feeble line of questioning showed that they had done little homework on the portfolio areas. The only exception, though, was the member for Tablelands. As a new member, she made a fair effort to contribute well. But I thought it disappointing that the more experienced members of that committee did not give it a fair shake. I am not trying to be smart.

I believe the budget estimates are a very significant process within the Queensland parliament. It is not easy for ministers to dodge a barrage of well-researched, probing questions. But that is not what I as chair witnessed from opposition members. I witnessed an opposition that threw a wet lettuce at each minister, and I do not think that is good enough. It might be arrogant for a relatively new member like me to say that sort of thing, but I really do believe the Queensland public needs to know it has a very weak opposition. It is extremely disappointing that that is the case, given the effort that goes into these budget estimates hearings and the processes associated with them.

On a more positive note, as members of Estimates Committee F we heard of many positive initiatives occurring across those three portfolio areas. In relation to Employment, Training and Youth and the Arts, I was particularly pleased with the expansion of the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program across the state. In my region, the Brisbane south and Gold Coast regions, 9,500 people have gained jobs and/or training places through this program since its inception in 1998. This includes 292 people in the electorate of Algeria alone. I particularly commend Jean Jensen and the Acacia Ridge Community Support Association for her great work in setting up and running the Into Work Program. I commend also departmental officers Debbie Crompton, Kerry Holtz and Gavin Leckenby in my region for the tremendous support that they give to local job initiatives.

Some critics of labour market support programs say that they are not real jobs. I make a point of meeting with participants on all the programs in my area and checking out how they feel about those programs. Overwhelmingly, both the young people and the mature-age people in those programs speak very highly of the opportunities they are getting. They are getting money in their pocket, they are building networks and they are not isolated and left alone. It is important that at the state level we continue this. It is a shame that billions of dollars were ripped out of labour market programs when the Howard government came into office in 1997.

I am particularly keen to see attention and support given to mature-age job seekers. In my area a lot of people have been displaced. They are still only in their forties and they are trying to claw their way back and are having great difficulty. I am pleased that the minister has given me responsibility for

monitoring the implementation of two new budget initiatives for mature-age workers, that is, the Experience Pays program and Back to Work.

In responding to questions from government members about federal-state funding arrangements for education, the Education Minister painted a very bleak picture whereby million-dollar bonuses are being given to elite private schools in the southern states by the federal government while public education and non-elite schools, including small Catholic schools like Our Lady of Fatima in Acacia Ridge in my local area, miss out. I wonder if it is any coincidence that Treasurer Peter Costello was an old boy of Carey Grammar, Federal Education Minister David Kemp was an old boy of Scotch College, and Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson was an old boy of The Kings School—all of which will receive in excess of \$1 million in bonuses each year from the federal government.

The Australian Primary Schools Principals Association has been calling for the primary schools sector to be given higher levels of funding. This call must be heeded, but I do not like their chances of shifting the ideological bias the federal government is showing towards elite schools. In spite of being frowned upon by the federal government, public schools in Queensland offer wonderful educational opportunities and I am delighted that two of those new state-of-the-art schools are in my area, in the growth areas of Forest Lake and Calamvale. I was very pleased to hear the minister give assurances that the Calamvale college is on track.

Time expired.
