



Speech by

PETER LAWLOR

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

Hansard 1 August 2001

APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Mr LAWLOR (Southport—ALP) (4.47 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to rise to support the report of Estimates Committee B. Firstly, let me record my thanks to the parliamentary staff, particularly Andrew Timperley, the research assistant, and Merle Lockett, the executive assistant. I also thank the Hansard reporters and the ministers and their departmental staff for the very professional manner in which they approached this estimates committee hearing. Thanks also to our chairman, Geoff Wilson, for his efficiency, fairness and good humour during the hearing. I certainly disagree with the member for Callide, who was critical of the chairman. But, of course, he did not say anything about it at the appropriate time. Thanks also to the other members of the committee.

It is not possible in the time available today to cover all aspects of the committee's report. However, I will touch on a few of the more important issues. In relation to the Attorney-General's portfolio, \$10 million has been allocated over the next four years to Legal Aid Queensland. The minister mentioned—and this is an important issue, certainly to an old solicitor like me—that Legal Aid funding has risen 50 per cent from \$14.4 million in 1997-98 to \$21.7 million this financial year. That benefits a range of disadvantaged groups in our community, including indigenous women, assault victims, the mentally ill, children and so on.

The drug courts trial being conducted at Southport is an opportunity to break the drug cycle and to benefit offenders by offering them a chance to rehabilitate rather than go to jail. Another \$1.6 million has been allocated for the drug courts trial.

Another important issue in the Attorney-General's Department is the State Penalties Enforcement Registry. The purpose of that program is threefold: first, to ensure that the imposition of fines remains an effective penalty for our courts and that fines are recovered; second, to ensure that fine defaulters pay their debts to the community; and, third, of course, to keep fine defaulters out of jail. It is a system designed to provide people who have had a fine imposed on them with the greatest possible opportunity to pay that fine.

Some of the matters relevant to Police and Corrective Services have already been mentioned by the minister. The Tactical Crime Squad is a particularly welcome initiative. One of those squads will be located on the Gold Coast. The Beattie Labor government of course recognised the need for a balance in corrective services between providing funding for capital works and so on to ensure that prisons are secure and providing funds for rehabilitation.

The member for Callide made an attack on the minister and provided a reservation statement to the committee report. He said in that statement—this comment is indicative of the whole statement—that it was confirmed there had been 41 escapes and absconds from custodial correctional services in the past year, an unacceptably high number for which the minister must take great responsibility. The fact is that in 1997-98, under the coalition government, there were 53 absconds and escapes, and in the previous year there were 68. That just shows the hypocrisy of the member for Callide. This dissenting report is nothing but a montage of selective facts and misleading and politically motivated assertions. He refers to the credibility and reputation of the minister. Certainly this statement does nothing for the credibility and reputation of the member for Callide, but then I do not suppose he has much to worry about in that regard.

In the time I have remaining I will deal with the portfolio of Tourism and Racing. First, I am pleased to see that the \$2 million training track subsidy has been continued. I say that probably with a bit of selfish interest because, although it goes through the Queensland Principal Club, \$240,000 goes to the Gold Coast Turf Club, the largest training facility in Queensland. It has almost 600 horses in training at the Gold Coast. That club is very appreciative of the training track subsidy.

Time expired.
