



Speech by

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APPROPRIATION BILLS [ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F]

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (3.27 p.m.): In rising to speak in this debate on Estimates Committee F, I wish to place on record my thanks to ministers, members and staff for their cooperation.

Firstly, I refer to a question to the Employment Minister relating to the Premier's recent announcements about the proposed \$1.2 billion magnesium manufacturing plant which was to be built at Stanwell in central Queensland by the Australian Magnesium Corporation. This project had brought great hope and expectations to many people and would have had a tremendous impact on the state and national economies at a time when business is floundering and the Queensland jobless rate is spiralling. We were told that we could expect thousands of jobs in this new light metals industry—7,000 jobs to be precise—with engineering skills and all sorts of other skills required. Traineeships were to be provided also. Then came the anti-climax.

After we had all been led to believe the deal had already been clinched, we found that the government had not even raised the money for the project. It certainly makes one wonder if this is a reflection of this smart government's jobs, jobs, jobs program. It is also interesting to note that the Goss Labor government made a similar attempt in the early 1990s to establish a stainless steel plant on the Calliope River near Gladstone. It also failed. Back then, a high-powered trade delegation sought funds from overseas financial boardrooms. It came back empty-handed after being told that no substantial seed money was available for manufacturing in an area that European, American and British interests regarded as their exclusive domain. This sounds very much like egg on face.

I now turn to education. A question addressed to the minister during the estimates examinations related to the large amount of resources expended by Education Queensland on behaviour management in its schools. The minister acknowledged that Education Queensland is still grappling with the issue of behaviour management. Huge amounts of money are spent providing support staff to deal with this problem. There have been trials of alternative schools, efforts towards early intervention, and classroom support involving about 300 staff in education districts. There has also been support to develop and implement school behaviour management plans in every school. A behaviour management committee in every district determines local response through a mix of teachers, teachers aides, guidance officers, social workers and psychologists. All of this certainly represents a lot of salaries to be paid in the name of behaviour management. No wonder Education Queensland's budget needs to be so high at \$4.3 billion.

And that is not all. Teachers have a range of options to deal with behaviour problems, ranging from counselling and time-out provisions to suspension and exclusion. Suspensions range from one to five days and from six to 20 days—certainly a lot of lost classroom hours. I personally know of students who have been suspended, only to turn to crime. While under suspension they become involved in such things as drugs or breaking into homes and businesses. Then comes the eventual trip to court for them to be only rapped over the knuckles and let off to reoffend. They think it is all just a huge joke.

Despite all the money presently being thrown into behaviour management projects, I am still receiving complaints about abysmal behaviour standards in some schools in my electorate. Parents have had to take their children away from these schools and send them to neighbouring schools. They do not do this lightly, as they have to carry the burden of extra bus fares, a cost that amounts in most

cases to \$50 or even \$60 a week per student—not cheap by any standards and considered as a most unfair impost by most parents.

On a brighter note, the government's school-based apprenticeship and traineeship schemes are, I believe, a step in the right direction. They give skills to students in years 11 and 12 that should provide a sound basis for future employment. In conclusion I say that I found that the ministers answered questions fairly, and I thank them for that.

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Education) (3.31 p.m.): At the outset I place on the record my thanks to the members of Estimates Committee F and to its chair, the member for Algester, for all of her work. I extend my thanks also for the work of departmental officers and the staff of my ministerial office.

This was a budget for education that delivered a significant increase to the Education portfolio. We see this year a record \$4.3 billion worth of spending in state government funds in the education area. That represents an 8.9 per cent increase in the state government appropriation for the portfolio.

Education lies at the heart of the Beattie government's Smart State vision. It is also a fair increase when it comes to the balance between state schools and non-state schools. As I outlined to the committee, we see this year an increase of \$269 million, or 9.1 per cent, in state funding to Queensland's public schools and an increase of \$23.2 million, or 9.5 per cent, to our non-government schools. The Queensland government is not prepared to go down the road that Dr Kemp has on school funding and provoke division between public and private schools.

I was particularly pleased to respond to some of the issues raised by the members, particularly the government members and the member for Tablelands, Ms Rosa Lee Long. These members used the estimates process to ask detailed questions about matters that were of concern to their constituents and to parents generally. They raised matters such as the importance of capital works and maintenance, the cost of maintaining computer networks in schools, support for students with disabilities and curriculum reform. These are the same sorts of issues I encounter from parents, teachers and students on a regular basis.

I would encourage the opposition members of the committee to in future take the lead of some of the government members and the Independent member rather than, as they chose on the day, to act as a mouthpiece for Dr Kemp. I noticed the member for Beaudesert earlier attacking the chair, the member for Algester, for the order in which she allowed questions. It seems that he was very aggravated by the fact that government members got to ask questions first. One would think from that attack that he had some scintillating, interesting and in-depth questions to put to the ministry. Alas, that was not the case. He chose instead to use his time as an opportunity, as I said, to act as a mouthpiece for the federal minister.

It seems that one of the concerns of the federal minister is that it appeared, on his reading, that the state government was not acknowledging Commonwealth funds. For example, he claims that the Commonwealth funds for the Quality Teacher Program and the maths and science centres went unacknowledged. The member for Beaudesert told the committee—

Obviously, my criticism is that nowhere in your budget papers have you made reference to any federal money.

I draw to the attention of the member and the House that page 1-5 of the MPS clearly acknowledges Commonwealth funds. I also point him to pages 1-56 to 1-59, which contain 36 separate references to Commonwealth funding. So it is not as if we are keeping it a secret.

We recognise that education funding is a partnership between the Commonwealth and the state. In fact Peter Beattie, in the *Peter Beattie and Labor plan for technology, maths and science in the smart state*, during the recent state election publicly stated in the election policy that he would use \$10 million of the refund from the federal government's enrolment benchmark adjustment to invest in our children's maths, science and IT skills. So David Kemp might not have paid any attention during the Queensland state election campaign, but there is no doubt that we made that as public as we possibly could have.

I note today that David Kemp is also claiming that there has been no recognition for his funds in the Quality Teacher Program. I am happy to put on the record that in Queensland almost \$38 million is spent every year on the professional development of our teachers and that the Commonwealth funds about \$7 million of that. He may well be very sensitive on the issue of Commonwealth acknowledgment. I hope that he does not start putting stickers on our teachers, as he does with our books, to acknowledge the training money he is putting in.

I note that there has been no dissenting report produced by the opposition members of the estimates committee. I take it that their questions were therefore fully answered and that this constitutes unanimous support for the government's commitment in the Education portfolio. I congratulate the member for Algester for the ringing endorsement of her committee's work.

The Treasurer, in introducing this budget, indicated that it would deliver on the Beattie government's election promises. We have done that in Education. This budget sees all of our election commitments funded, and they will be implemented over the coming years during the term of this government. This is a budget that I think is a very good start for this term of the Beattie Labor government. I am very proud to be overseeing it. I look forward to implementing the commitments that are made in it. I look forward to next year's budget, to building on that investment. Again, I thank the committee for its work, I thank the departmental officers for the incredible amount of hours and hard work that they put into the process, and I thank the members of the committee.
