



Speech by

Mr R. QUINN

MEMBER FOR ROBINA

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APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES B

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (3.30 p.m.): The day the budget was brought down I instanced to the House the growth in the Public Service in Queensland in the years 1998 to 2001 under the first Beattie government. There was growth over those three years of some 24,000 people—a 16 per cent increase. I mentioned that less than half of those numbers were to be found in the departments of Police, Health and Education. So fewer than half of them were actually in frontline service delivery areas of teaching, nursing and policing.

Only now has the government admitted that those figures are right and put in place a voluntary early retirement scheme to bring back the numbers in the Public Service. The government now understands that the growth in outlays in terms of the increase in Public Service payroll is fast outstripping the additional income stream the government is getting through additional taxes and charges, either at state level or at Commonwealth level.

When we debate the estimates of the various departments we ought to recognise that, because the government has mismanaged the growth in the Public Service over the past three to five years, the levels of service in these departments are nowhere near the optimum. If the government had managed the increase in the Public Service much more efficiently, we would have more teachers, more nurses and more police. We should bear that in mind when we talk about the success of the government over the past couple of years and when we debate these estimates. Having said that, some things in the portfolio areas of emergency services and police need to be commented on.

Recently there have been stories in the local Gold Coast media about the level of service, particularly ambulance services, on the Gold Coast. While the minister might have disputed the details of those stories, he did acknowledge that because of the growth on the Gold Coast there was a real need to provide additional resources there. I hope that this budget moves towards providing those additional resources over the next 12 months. To sustain the current levels, when growth will continue to occur, really lets down the Gold Coast community.

I move on to Corrective Services and Police. One of the things I think the government has been very remiss on in the past couple of years is moving more quickly to have more school based police. School based policing was an initiative of the coalition government from 1996 to 1998. It saw a tremendous improvement in terms of building relationships between young people and police in our schooling system. For a number of years there simply has not been the necessary growth in funds to enable this program to be expanded into other schools around Queensland.

Particularly when schools understand and recognise the value of this program, I would have thought the government would apply more funds to this program over the past couple of years. The government should give this program really serious thought. It is a valuable program in our schools. It is one which builds trust and fosters relationships between police and young people. It improves the tone of the school immeasurably. Principals, teachers and parents will attest to that fact. I think the government really needs to take on board their views and put substantial funds into this program, because it has long-term community benefits.

I raise the issue of rehabilitation programs for serious sexual offenders. I have made public comment about this in the past. Only a fraction of those convicted for these crimes actually undergo and successfully complete rehabilitation programs. I believe community values are such that the community would expect people convicted of these crimes to undergo a rehabilitation or treatment program prior to release. People convicted of these crimes simply should not be given the option of not undergoing the program and then being released. That is not acceptable, in my view. I think in the vast majority of cases the community would agree with me.

I concur that the estimates for these departments should be passed, on the understanding, however, that service levels are nowhere near where they should be because of the increase in the Public Service over that period of time.