



Speech by

Mr R. QUINN

MEMBER FOR ROBINA

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APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES C

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (4.05 p.m.): At the outset I acknowledge the way in which the member for Mudgeeraba handled her position as chair of the committee. She did an excellent job in that regard and I acknowledge it publicly. There are two issues I wish to comment on. First, I refer to the number of new schools included in this budget. With two new schools in this year's budget, it is probably the lowest number of new schools built by a government for 10 or 15 years. There have been budgets in the last 10 years where eight, nine or even 10 new schools were built. In terms of growth, particularly the growth corridors of the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast, this budget does not quite measure up. I raised that issue during the estimates committee itself. There may be additional new classroom blocks in existing schools to meet additional growth in certain areas, but in terms of the number of new schools there is a shortfall. Whilst the members for Mudgeeraba and Gaven might be pleased that they are getting new schools, there are other areas of the Gold Coast that deserve an equal consideration in terms of the application of funds for the growth of enrolments in areas.

Mrs Reilly: Keep working on them.

Mr QUINN: Yes, you will need to do better than two. There is the issue of the Smart State agenda and the government's emphasis on biotechnology. Whilst I support this initiative—and I have said that on a number occasions—it is important that we start to measure the outcomes, because simply spending large amounts of money, particularly in capital and in some cases some recurrent funding, over a sustained period of time without a measurement of what is going on and an idea of how to sustain that in the future will not cut the mustard at the end of the day. There will be a time—and the Premier has already flagged it—when the government no longer will be able to afford to inject the huge amounts of capital it is injecting now. The program put in place has to be self-sustaining. The way to do that is to focus on the issues in education. I raised the issue with the minister during the Estimates that we need to measure the number of students taking on board biotechnology subjects in the education system and study the outcomes. I was pleased to see the minister take that on board as a reasonable suggestion.

Another suggestion I make now—and I make it publicly for the first time—is that we put in place a competition within our high schools for senior school students to participate in some sort of competition in terms of biotechnology. When I was in Toronto at the Biotech 2002 Conference I was quite encouraged to see within the Canadian system a competition called Biogenius, where high school students demonstrated through experiments their knowledge of biotechnology. Some of the things that the students were doing in terms of their experiments and research was top quality and first rate. If we can engender that sort of culture within our own school system we would be well on the way to making sure that the school system itself sustains the biotechnology push in this state.

I hope that the government will take on board this suggestion of a biogenius competition not only in terms of rewards for students—and that is an important part of it—but in terms of pumping some extra funding into the professional development of teachers of science in high schools. This will mean that their skill levels will rise, that they will have confidence that they in fact can teach the subject and then that will rub off onto the students. If we can in the longer term engender within the schooling system a culture of biotechnology and the importance of science and elevate the importance of and teaching of science, we will be well on the way to making sure that the substantial amounts of money

we have already invested in biotechnology initiatives in this state will not be needed in the future. The schooling system will start to pump through the schools highly qualified, ambitious and confident people in terms of research and dealing with biotechnology matters. That is the key to making this a Smart State. It is not about simply pumping money into startup companies and research activities over a short period, decreasing the funds and expecting those companies to go on. That may not occur. They may fall over in the future for a variety of reasons. The key to making this the Smart State is getting this into the schooling system. We need to elevate the skills and knowledge of teachers and to make sure that the students take that on board as they go through so that as they leave high school they have the necessary skills to keep on with the Smart State agenda. That is what I would like to see the government do.