



Speech by

CHRISTINE SCOTT

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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EDUCATION [QUEENSLAND STUDIES AUTHORITY] BILL

Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT (Charters Towers—ALP) (12.51 p.m.): I rise to support this bill and, in doing so, would like to comment on a number of issues. I remember speaking to the Treasurer one day about funding. At the time he confessed to me that his electorate had no police stations, no hospital, one fire station—he did not actually tell me about that; I found out about it later—half a school, because it is on the dividing line between two electorates, and not many kilometres of road. Therefore, the expenditure on that electorate per capita is quite low.

A quick count in my electorate reveals I have around 22 schools, 18 police stations, 13 ambulance stations, 13 hospitals or bush nursing establishments, upwards of seven fire stations, innumerable rural fire brigades and SES groups, and I can only guess at the number of kilometres of bitumen road. So per capita we certainly have more money spent on us than our city cousins, and I have 10 per cent fewer people in my electorate than the metropolitan seats. Our one-teacher schools are incredibly well resourced. They are all airconditioned and often have one computer per five students, as well as a well-stocked library. A number of them have their own buses. I wonder how many of the city schools can boast similar facilities! We have a good mix of primary and secondary schools, some P-12, P-10, P-7 and some independent boarding schools which are doing a valuable job. For people who live in Richmond, Aramac, Alpha, Jericho, Georgetown or a lot of the other small communities and want their children to finish year 12, the only way that can happen is for them to go to boarding school. At this time boarding schools are not core business for the state government. The independent boarding schools in my electorate are doing a great job—as are all the other schools—of providing quality education for students in our rural and regional communities.

We have been getting a bit of stick in the chamber about Cool Schools over the last couple of days. In particular, I have heard Richmond State School mentioned more than once. I take on board those comments. However, the number of schools with non-airconditioned rooms in my electorate is small. One school in particular has issues in respect of heritage listing, but we will work around that. All state schools in the electorate of Charters Towers that fall within the Cooler Schools zone—that is, 22 of them—have some form of airconditioning provided by the Cool Schools and the Cooler Schools Programs. Additionally, Richmond State School has evaporative airconditioning in approximately nine classrooms and refrigerated airconditioning in two offices.

Ms Bligh: It's nice to have some facts on the record.

Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT: I thank the minister. So if this is the worst case scenario the opposition can find in my 15 and a half per cent of Queensland, then overall the picture cannot be too bad. And if there are problems, why were they not fixed in the years 1957 to 2001 when the opposition held the seat?

Mr Terry Sullivan: Or even in the Borbidge-Sheldon government just a couple of years ago.

Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT: I was just about to get to that. I will give members a brief overview of the Cooler Schools in our region. Cooler Schools was introduced by the Labor government in 1998. The program provided assistance to schools located in central and northern Queensland by supporting measures that improved students' thermal comfort and, therefore, provided an environment more conducive to learning. The program proved very popular amongst school communities because, amongst other things, it allowed the installation of mechanical airconditioning systems and some evaporative cooling systems into resource centres and new buildings at full state cost and the

installation of airconditioning systems into teaching and other areas under a \$4 for \$1 subsidy. In 1998 the Labor government increased the subsidy to \$4 for every \$1 to allow a greater number of school communities to be part of the program. The subsidy is particularly attractive to school communities as it allows airconditioning to be installed into teaching and other spaces which would otherwise not be possible. The popularity of the program has led to applications for assistance exceeding annual budgets for the past two years.

As to the total amount expended on airconditioning under the Borbidge government, at that time 10 schools in the Charters Towers electorate received airconditioning as part of the Cool Schools program, with a total expenditure of \$597,115. Expenditure to date on schools in the Charters Towers electorate under this current government's Cooler Schools Program shows a total of 15 schools in the Charters Towers electorate have accessed the Cooler Schools Program to date, with an expected total expenditure of over \$2 million exclusive of GST. As part of round 1 in the 1998 program, six school projects in the Charters Towers electorate accessed the Cooler Schools Program, with a total expenditure of \$695,521. As part of round 2, the 1999 program, 10 school projects in the electorate accessed the Cooler Schools Program, with a total estimated expenditure of almost \$1 million. As part of round 3, the 2000 program, two schools in the electorate have been approved to access the next round of the Cooler Schools Program, with a forecast total expenditure of \$408,250. So I ask: what did the present opposition do about the problem during the 44 years when it held the seat of Charters Towers? And if the schools are not all cool, what is its excuse?

We in the 3R areas of the state often feel marginalised and disadvantaged and I notice a current letter writing program by the opposition is playing on these feelings. But the Beattie Labor government is spending 66c of every tax dollar outside the south-east corner. I know that people in the green belt can have services such as hospitals, schools and roads delivered more cheaply than can areas west of the Great Dividing Range. For example, until very recently it cost around 30c per kilowatt to deliver electricity to Boulia, but it was still sold for the same price—around 10c per kilowatt—as people pay in Brisbane. That is a good example of the Beattie government looking after people in the bush.

The truth of the matter is that the relationship between city and country is a symbiotic one, that is, each depends on the other for their existence. The city needs the bush to produce its food and fuel, and the bush needs the city to buy its products, otherwise there is no point in producing them. We are all in this together. I do not imagine that I would do very well if my next Toyota were to be delivered in a shipping container with a Mig welder, a set of tools and an instruction book. Yes, our vehicles need to be assembled by our city cousins—and a great job they do of it, too. So let us forget about this 'poor fellow me' stuff. It is never going to be easy to live in the bush, and sometimes it is not easy to live in the city, either. But we live where we do because we want to. I would not do very well representing Aspley, and I do not imagine Bonny Barry would feel very comfortable representing Charters Towers. But she does a great job in Aspley. The Beattie Labor government is delivering for all Queenslanders. Opposition members say that they are representing the bush, but while they are talking about it—talking the talk—Labor members across the state are getting on with the job of actually walking the walk and doing the job.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT: We have heard a lot from the opposition about various matters to do with education. We have also heard the Premier talk about the 'whine list' and say, 'We work, you whinge.' I agree.

I thank all the staff in our schools and the parents and citizens groups in my electorate and across the state for the valuable work they do for all of our children. I also thank the Premier and his ministers for doing a great job of looking after all Queenslanders and for never forgetting the people of my electorate. I commend this bill to the House.