



Speech by

Hon. GORDON NUTTALL

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

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APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES C

Hon. G. R. NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (Minister for Industrial Relations) (4.35 p.m.): I thank all members of the committee for their contributions to the debate. We have certainly come a long way. For the edification of members in the chamber, the honourable member for Yeronga touched on the issue of how estimates used to be dealt with in parliaments before the Goss Labor government. Basically, three or four portfolios would be debated for about an hour and a half in this chamber—not in an estimates process—and that was the whole budget; it was knocked over in an afternoon or a day. So we have come a long way since then. It was the Goss Labor government that introduced the estimates process, which has continued to evolve since those early days. It gives an opportunity to all members of parliament to have a good look at budget sectors in which they have a particular interest to see where the government is actually spending its money. This certainly makes the government more accountable.

My portfolio of Industrial Relations is not all about conflicts and difficulties with trade unions. There are a range of sectors in which I believe we have done quite a remarkable job. For example, we are addressing pay equity and work and family issues for Queensland women. Those are important issues for this government. Particularly in relation to work and family, we are one of the first governments in the country to address that issue. Hopefully, I will have more to say about that tomorrow. We have also decided to spend quite a bit of money to help young people and women workers. We have set up a Young Workers Advisory Service and funded it to the tune of some \$300,000 a year over three years. Young people are able to contact the advisory service to find out their rights and obligations as employees. That is a very important issue for us to address, particularly for those young people between the ages of 15 and 24. I am very pleased about that.

As honourable members would know, workplace health and safety is one sector in which I have had a particular interest since I became the minister. Yes, we are putting a great deal of effort and emphasis into workplace health and safety issues. I am particularly pleased that we have found money to address the enforcement of that. Some \$4.7 million has been committed to stepping up the enforcement of safety and industrial laws in our workplaces. We have also decided to spend quite a deal of money—an additional \$3.7 million—on electrical safety in this state. That increases the funding on electrical safety to some \$7.5 million. Members will hear more about that in parliament next week. A number of sectors are of particular importance.

In relation to enterprise bargaining, the honourable member for Nicklin touched on the issue of health in particular. The government does value its work force. The latest offer that we have put on the table, namely 3.5 per cent per annum, equates on a cumulative basis over three years to 10.8 per cent, which is closer to 11 per cent over three years. For those at the lower end of the scale that represents an extra \$23. So if that is higher than the 3.5 per cent, their figure certainly is more substantial. I think we have genuinely tried to address the concerns of our workers throughout the state. We believe that we do need a new system rather than the enterprise bargaining system. A review is about to take place. I encourage the trade union movement to work closely with the government on that review so that we can find a better way of not only giving pay rises but working through the various industrial issues that arise from time to time with our work force.