



Speech by

**JAN JARRATT**

**MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY**

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Hansard 31 July 2002

**APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES C**

**Ms JARRATT** (Whitsunday—ALP) (4.17 p.m.): In rising to speak to the report of Estimates Committee C, I wish first to pay tribute to the chair of the committee, Mrs Di Reilly, for the professional way in which the day's hearings were conducted. I commend the opposition committee members for the respect and cooperation shown to the chair during the hearing. Sadly, I understand that this was not the case on all committees. I also place on record my appreciation of the enormous workload that budget estimates places upon government ministers and their staff. Each of the ministers reporting to Estimates Committee C are to be congratulated on their preparedness and professionalism. They each demonstrated a profound knowledge of their respective portfolio areas and, given the level of scrutiny available to opposition members, they have demonstrated clear integrity in the budgetary process.

Members of Estimates Committee C heard of many positive initiatives occurring across the portfolios of Employment, Training, Youth and the Arts, Industrial Relations and Education. I turn my attention firstly to Minister Foley's portfolio of Employment, Training, Youth and the Arts. It goes without saying that one of the most important and challenging tasks of government is to put in place initiatives that tackle unemployment. Therefore, I was delighted to hear evidence that clearly indicates that the Beattie government is continuing to lead the way in this arena through programs under the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative that have already delivered more than 40,000 jobs since their inception, and the Community Jobs Plan, which provides jobs for long-term unemployed while aiding the development of community infrastructure.

The mature-age unemployed in our communities face a particularly unenviable situation. Many of these people held long-term jobs in a single field prior to the loss of their employment so they need assistance to retrain and refocus in order to gain re-employment. This assistance is available through a government program that provides skills training, career advice and information technology skills, and I am delighted to hear that the program is on track to achieve its target of providing assistance to 1,000 mature-age people. Additionally, assistance is provided through the Experience Pays initiative, which provides a wage subsidy to employers who put on mature-age workers. I wish to echo Minister Foley's plea for more employers to take advantage not only of the wage subsidy but also of the maturity and experience offered by those over the age of 45.

At the other end of the spectrum, both Minister Foley and Minister Bligh outlined the exciting initiatives proposed through the *Queensland the Smart State: education and training reforms for the future* document. Having recently attended public forums in both Mackay and Proserpine where the initiatives and proposals were discussed and debated at length, I am convinced that the great majority of people welcome the proposals as the most important reforms in education for decades. While I am not sure that consensus has been reached on all the proposals, I am convinced that as a community we have a moral obligation to address the issues of the provision of a quality education that offers choice in pathways and flexibility of delivery. We cannot sit by and allow more young people to simply disappear from the system without attaining qualifications and opportunity. I put on record my sincere gratitude to Minister Foley and Minister Bligh for having the foresight and dedication that underlies the development of the education and training reforms for the future package.

Turning now to the portfolio of Industrial Relations, which I guess can best be described in one word—challenging—it is important to look beyond the difficulties of present enterprise bargaining negotiations to see the very real and important achievements made through Minister Nuttall and his

department. One of the major tasks with which the department is charged is to ensure that workplaces across the state are safe, productive and fair. We face many challenges as a government in delivering this outcome, not the least of which is the increasing casualisation of the work force. Indeed, Queensland has the highest rate of casualisation of any state in the country, and the two groups who suffer most from this are women and youth.

I have heard many people in casual employment say that they would like to join a union for protection of their rights and conditions, but are afraid to because the boss would only sack them. I am delighted, therefore, that Minister Nuttall has overseen the introduction of an updated family package that delivers access to unpaid parental, carer and bereavement leave for long-term casual employees. Women workers will further benefit from the government's commitment to improving gender pay equity. I also welcome the minister's commitment to develop codes of practice that will address the issue of reasonable working hours. Such initiatives have been achievable only through a Labor government as they go to the heart of Labor's commitment to the wellbeing of all workers in this state. I commend Ministers Foley, Nuttall and Bligh for their outstanding performance under the scrutiny of the estimates committee and for their strength of commitment to the people of Queensland.