



Speech by

ELISA ROBERTS

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

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APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C

Miss ELISA ROBERTS (Gympie—Ind) (4.13 p.m.): I would like to begin my response by acknowledging the chair of Estimates Committee C for his fairness in the allocation of questions and to the admin staff for their friendly assistance. The issues and effects of high unemployment rates are of huge importance to the people of my electorate. Whilst the unemployment rate for Gympie has improved since I was elected, with Gympie going from having the third highest unemployment rate in the state to the seventh, this is a positive outcome. But it is still way too high and the issue of unemployment still remains a priority. It is for this reason that I was pleased to have been a member of Estimates Committee C so that I could question the Minister for Employment, Training and Youth about areas which are crucial to the lowering of Gympie's unemployment statistics.

My first question related to the delivery of targeted training to the region in response to the specific training needs of local industry, enterprise and individuals. Apparently the Gympie campus of TAFE does not offer this type of targeted training, as is the case at the Central Queensland Institute of TAFE. However, the Gympie electorate was in receipt of \$740,000 for user choice funding, which was allocated to 35 registered training organisations. Apprenticeships and traineeships are being carried out in areas such as automotive sales and personal service areas as well as primary industry, tourism and hospitality. The very well renowned Gympie and District Landcare Group received approximately \$427,000 for the delivery of horticulture training by the local TAFE.

The Gympie electorate has also seen almost \$1 million under the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative, and Gympie has had 151 full-time public sector trainees, including six school based trainees and two full-time apprentices. As at 30 April this year, there are 106 school based trainees and four school based apprentices, which is a significant increase from last year—which had only 64 school based traineeships.

Whilst the minister stated that he was mindful of the fact that unemployment is a big issue in the Gympie electorate and the people who make up the electorate are grateful for each one of the employment and training programs, there still remains one major impediment to employment—that is, the lack of adequate public transport. Whilst public transport is a Queensland Transport issue, it has become a contributing factor in the ability of people getting from areas such as Pomona, Cooran, Kandanga, Amamoor and Imbil to the Gympie Centrelink office.

I have in response to this issue approached the federal government in regard to having a Centrelink Jobseeker computer installed in Pomona to enable easier access to the site. I have been told of people who have missed out on job opportunities because they cannot depend on a regular bus service at the hours their respective work requires, particularly for shiftwork and bar work which is outside the basic nine to five bus operating hours for those areas which do have a bus service.

The minister commented during the committee that the federal government should be more proactive in assisting the unemployed via fare assistance. However, fare assistance means little to those who do not have regular access to public transport. One of the issues I have been actively interested in over the last two years has been that of the lack of airconditioning in many of the state schools throughout the Gympie electorate. Up until this year's estimates committee I had lobbied the Minister for Education to have our schools included in the Cooler Schools program. Unfortunately, three budgets from this budget have failed to include Gympie students as recipients of the necessary funding for airconditioning.

With this in mind, I attempted another approach to obtaining airconditioning in our schools via the issue of workplace health and safety. During the hearing with the Minister for Industrial Relations, I quoted the description of workplace health and safety as outlined in the last budget. It states that one of the primary aims is to improve workplace health and safety, and I assumed this would be for all public sector employees, including teachers. According to the workplace amenity standard of 2000 it states that 'where airconditioning is not installed the inside temperature should not exceed by more than three degrees Celsius any outside temperature of 22 degrees or more'. I can assure this House that temperatures inside the schools within the Gympie electorate often exceed 25 degrees Celsius.

When I asked the minister to explain why teachers were exempt from the same working conditions as other public sector employees the committee was told that these were only recommendations of an advisory standard and therefore not compulsory. Obviously this government picks and chooses who has the entitlement to work under reasonable conditions and who does not. Nevertheless, I sincerely hope that the schools throughout the Gympie electorate will get a positive outcome for airconditioning in their schools at next year's budget.