



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (4.28 p.m.): I am pleased to be able to make a contribution to this consideration of the report of Estimates Committee C. Even though I was not a member of the estimates committee, it was the estimates committee that dealt with the portfolio responsibility of Industrial Relations. It is one of the areas which I have responsibility for as shadow minister. Therefore, I did play a small part in the committee that considered the budget allocations for the portfolio of Industrial Relations. It is not a portfolio that has a big budget so there was not a lot to consider in terms of budget allocation.

I did take the opportunity to question the minister about a number of issues, amongst which was the level of industrial disputes in Queensland and the extent to which that level of late had been so much higher than southern states.

The minister informed the committee at the time that it was something of an abnormality—I think a glitch or something was the term he used. It will be interesting to see in the year ahead—between now and when we next consider that question at estimates—whether or not that level of industrial disputation we saw in the figures that were released a day or two before this committee hearing are, in fact, continued through and it becomes a feature of the Queensland industrial relations sphere that that level of disputation continues. Everybody would join with me in expressing the hope that that is not the case, that we do not see a continuation of that high level of industrial disputation, which is to nobody's benefit.

The other issue that I want to take the opportunity to make some comment on that was part of the consideration of this estimates committee is the Cooler Schools Program, and other members have spoken about the Cooler Schools Program in this debate already. My electorate is in a unique position—I do not suppose it is the only electorate in this position—in that some schools are eligible for the Cooler Schools Program and other schools are on the other side of the line and, therefore, are not eligible for the Cooler Schools Program. This raises a degree of concern, of course, between students of different schools who find themselves on different sides of the line. This has been a program that has delivered some very real benefits to schools who have been lucky enough to qualify for it, and it is one that I am pleased to see the government continue.

There have been concerns, and some quite justifiable concerns, about some of the specifications that have been imposed on schools by Q-Build—and not without some good reason I might add. Some of those specifications have resulted in the cost of the airconditioning that the schools have had to bear being quite considerably more than would have been the case without those specifications being imposed. A case in point in my electorate is the Theodore school, where the walkways and the decking that Q-Build insisted on for it being part of the Cooler Schools Program have made the school end up looking like some sort of a prison farm. When one drives into the Theodore school one almost expects to see the guards walking along the walkways that are along the top of every building. To some extent, it has gone a bit over the top in terms of what has been required and has made it a lot harder for that school community to raise the money that it needs to raise to ensure that its classrooms are airconditioned.

The other issue considered by this estimates committee related to employment and training and apprenticeships. I, too, would like to add my voice to what has been said by other members already this afternoon about the importance of apprenticeships. Most electorates across the state would be seeing

the effects of a gross shortage of tradesmen in all of the trades. It is critically important that young people have the opportunity to complete apprenticeships and become skilled tradesmen and qualified tradesmen to be able to fill those roles in the future. The figures that are important are the number of apprentices who complete their apprenticeship, not so much the number of apprentices who take up apprenticeships. There are a number of areas in which the government can take some very positive action to make sure that apprentices are able to complete those apprenticeships so that a big percentage or, hopefully, as many as possible of those who enter into those apprenticeships are able to complete them and become qualified tradesmen.