



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 2); APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL (NO. 2)

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (4.41 pm): I rise to speak to the Appropriation Bill (No. 2). I would like to draw attention to the lack of single share accommodation for people with disabilities in Charters Towers. Charters Towers has a very high number of residents with disabilities, yet it has a very low number of houses and units available to disabled residents. A very successful program, which provides single share accommodation for those with a disability, is currently being run by the Ingham Parents Support Group. This housing arrangement allows for several disabled residents to effectively pool the resources available to them so that quality care can be provided by a single carer at a single residence. This arrangement fully utilises all resources, facilities and services available while ensuring that residents of the accommodation each receive quality care and a high level of independence.

I am also very concerned by the fact that Charters Towers does not currently have a permanent appropriate facility where respite can be provided for the disabled who are being cared for by family members or guardians. One couple is currently caring for a grandchild who has a disability. If they require respite care they must take their grandchild 130 kilometres to Townsville or agree to have a carer come into their home to care for their grandchild. As members can imagine, it is extremely difficult to unwind and relax when a person knows they are in the same house as a loved one who requires care and yet they are not assisting with their care. Many of these families are burnt out and are searching for answers.

The state government's costs per person for public housing in Charters Towers are extremely low when compared to the cost incurred for public housing in metropolitan areas. I believe Charters Towers deserves its fair share of funding. Parents with children or young adults with a disability need the security of knowing that they have suitable accommodation available to them and 24-hour respite care available outside their family homes. It is vitally important that the appropriate accommodation facilities are provided to those who are most in need.

The apprenticeship issue is a big issue with regard to some of the mining communities within my electorate. I would like to bring to the government's attention the mining town of Moranbah, which is going through a coalmining boom. At the present moment there is a limited water supply. There are many problems with regard to local businesses being able to provide apprentices.

The state and federal governments are committed to ensuring that skilled workers are available to all industries by supporting new apprenticeship schemes. In 2004 and 2005 the Australian government will spend more than \$725.5 million on new apprentices. The state government has pledged \$7.2 million under the Strategic Employment Development Program to provide employer incentives.

As I was saying, in towns like Moranbah rent is over \$400 a week. Local businesses that are there to service the mines cannot get apprentices because they are paying those apprentices an approximate figure of \$300 a week when it costs \$400 a week for accommodation. I believe that some form of public unit accommodation needs to be provided and supported by the state government to encourage apprentices to live in Moranbah. This would enable them to utilise their skills, and it would be a greater incentive for them to use their skills in the mining industry and other areas further down the track.

There is another very difficult issue. Local small businesses in townships like Moranbah will put on these apprentices to utilise their skills. However, within 12 months or two years those apprentices will move to the mines because the mines have offered them accommodation. It is a big problem to maintain accommodation for apprentices in towns like Moranbah.

I would just like to raise the issue of the Kennedy Development Road. This road runs from Hughenden to Lynd Junction, and it links the Atherton Tableland. This road is classified as a regional road and is only one of two roads in north Queensland that remains unsealed at this classification level. Just last year more than half a million cattle came out of that region. It is an inland highway from Cairns to Melbourne. There is an unlimited amount of tourists who use that road. We had more than nine tourist buses coming down that road within two weeks, but this cannot happen anymore. The situation has occurred now where bulldust is nine inches thick and only last year there were nine accidents.

Mr Lawlor interjected.

Mr KNUTH: That is true.

Because of this bulldust there were nine accidents within two weeks. I believe that this is a road of significance. It definitely needs to be looked at. The sealing of this road makes commonsense. It is an inland highway. It will open up rural and regional Queensland. It will relieve congestion from the south-east corner. It will encourage people from the south-east corner to move to rural and regional areas. If we do not have the infrastructure people will not move out there, and that is why this road is important.

It is a road from Cairns. We have the support from the Cairns Chamber of Commerce. We have the support from the Hughenden Chamber of Commerce, the Flinders Shire Council, the Richmond Shire Council and locals. The Porcupine Gorge is a significant reason alone, being the wonderful tourist attraction that it is, to have this road sealed. Sealing this road makes commonsense.

I would like to bring to members' attention one more issue regarding the Cooler Schools issue. We have towns in my electorate such as Richmond, Muttaborra and Hughenden which were in that Cooler Schools zone in the 1980s. They now fall out of that zone by one degree. Their evaporative airconditioners are run-down and are very costly to run. Those three schools offered to provide funding from the P&C. We are calling on the state government to assist those P&C groups with funding to upgrade the airconditioners at those schools. I urge this government to take all this into consideration, and I commend this bill to the House.