



Speech by

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; ESTIMATES F

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (2.56 pm): I rise today to make my contribution in the debate on the report of Estimates Committee F. I was a member of the estimates committee and I want to place on record my thanks to the chair and all other members of the committee, the research director and the Hansard and parliamentary staff who all put in a great deal of hard work to make the estimates committee run smoothly. That being said, I believe there is considerable room to reform the estimates committee process so that non-government members are able to properly scrutinise the government of the day.

During the committee hearings I asked the minister how many families in rural and remote areas were unable to regularly access respite services. The minister was unable to provide the relevant information to me at that time, and I am hoping that the minister will address this issue. While I recognise that the minister and his department face unique challenges in providing respite services to rural and remote families, I simply cannot emphasise strongly enough how important this is to those families. As a member representing a large rural electorate, I would hope that we see greater endeavours by the government on this matter in the future.

It also concerns me greatly that there is an extremely high level of unmet needs in the community. The government needs to allocate additional funding for children with disabilities. We are all aware of the great benefits of early intervention and the profound impact that early support can have in later life. Children are often neglected in the funding maze or lost amongst the desperate bids for resources within the disability sector. Sadly, this means that some children are not able to receive the appropriate treatment and support that they desperately need. Currently, funding allocated by the state government to services for children with disabilities makes up just 26 per cent of the Disability Services budget. Many service providers receive only marginal funding to assist children and, while I welcome any funding grants that target adults, it is a heartbreaking situation turning children away who are in need because they are not funded to provide those services. This is particularly tragic as we are all aware of the enormous benefits that early support can have on a child's entire life.

There is also a need for improvement in service for adults with disabilities. Many families and individuals who have approached me have told me of their difficulty in accessing support, particularly the adult lifestyle support package. I believe that every attempt should be made to assist Queenslanders with disabilities. There is also a large, eminent need for training programs for people in dealing with all types of disabilities, and the need for accommodation and respite is essential in these rural and remote areas. Many people in my electorate are forced to travel long distances to access services that are not available in their area. I directed a number of questions to the minister about the Disability Services registration of need database and I was very concerned about the high number of priority 1 and priority 2 clients who were not receiving the support that they required.

This is a critical issue that the government must address. I raised a number of issues with the minister, including the extremely high rate of abuse at the Basil Stafford Centre, the long-term care options for young people in nursing homes, funding for schools, festivals and funding to assist problem gamblers.

I would like to comment on an issue that I have raised with the minister regarding youth detention centres. I recognise that these detention centres have a responsibility to reform, retain or re-educate those youths who have gone off the rails and put them on a path of being responsible members of our community. I am aware that there is a considerable issue with youth crime in my electorate. Unfortunately, many youths do not see detention as any form of a deterrent. During the hearing I made the minister aware that for some young people detention was almost considered a rite of passage. I do not endorse the glorification of youth detention. I think the minister must address this issue if he truly wants to address the problems in relation to the juvenile justice aspect of his portfolio.

I believe we need to investigate the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre. It is known as 'Camp Cleveland'—a place which provides good food, games and new track shoes. Spending time there is regarded as a badge of honour among youth. The Cleveland Youth Detention Centre should be a deterrent for juvenile crimes. However, it has become a place where, to get into it, juveniles are prepared to steal, destroy property and become a public nuisance and inflict serious bodily harm on people. People need security. They need a guarantee from the state government that everything possible will be done to protect their lives, their property and their safety.

In closing, I would like to thank the member for Burdekin for her valuable contribution on a number of seniors issues, on which she will comment—and has commented. I would also like to thank the Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors for his contribution.