



Speech by

## Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Wednesday, 29 November 2006

---

### MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

#### Teaching of History in Schools

**Hon. PD BEATTIE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.38 am): History is already compulsory for Queensland students as part of the subject called Studies of Society and Environment. Because Australian history is a core part of years 1 to 10 of the Studies of Society and Environment syllabus, Queensland children finish their schooling well versed in our nation's history—and so they should—and we will continue to ensure that history remains a significant part of the school curriculum.

Today Queensland schools teach a combination of traditional topics such as the early explorers, colonial Australia, Federation and the Anzac experience in addition to more contemporary topics such as the Vietnam War and the civil rights and environmental movements. The Studies of Society and Environment syllabus for years 9 and 10 is a compulsory subject that many schools offer as a stand-alone Australian history subject.

In years 11 and 12, students can also study modern history or ancient history as stand-alone subjects. The strong emphasis our schools place on teaching history is reflected in enrolments in the senior secondary subjects of modern history, ancient history and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders studies which have remained strong over the past decade and have increased in the past five years.

History is not about the rote learning of a set of dates, names and places. It is about knowing how this country came about. I did history both at school and at university. I am a passionate supporter of the study of history, but it has to make sense. There is absolutely no point students knowing when Phar Lap won the Melbourne Cup. There is no point in having these crazy dates that mean nothing and rote learning without a broader understanding of our history and our culture. I am a passionate supporter, as are my ministers, in understanding Australia's history—that is, where we have come from and where we are going. Rote learning does not produce that.

In Queensland, teachers of history use a range of syllabus documents including Studies of Society and Environment years 1 to 10 syllabus, the years 9 and 10 history syllabus and senior secondary syllabuses for modern history, ancient history and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders studies to inform their curriculum planning. Our focus should always be on real outcomes. I say to the federal government that wants to make this into a cheap political exercise: let us have the real study of history, not rote learning which is crazy in anyone's language.

**Mr Copeland** interjected.

**Mr BEATTIE:** Let me take that interjection because normally I would not. I have spoken to Bob Carr about this. Bob Carr is a good friend of mine. Bob Carr shares my passion for history. I do not share his passion for the American Civil War and I think the Gettysburg Address was fantastic but too short. The important point that I want to make is that he shares my passion for history, but he does not believe in rote learning either. The member should not suggest that Bob Carr and I are at a different point on this. Bob Carr and I share the same view about history. I have actually discussed it with him. Let us move on.