



Speech by

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL (ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C)

Mr HOPPER (Darling Downs—NPA) (12.05 pm): I am very pleased to have this opportunity to comment on the report of Estimates Committee C insofar as it deals with the proposed expenditure of the vocational education and training portfolio. At the time of the committee's deliberations I had just assumed responsibility as the shadow spokesman for this portfolio. Although I now have responsibilities in other portfolio areas, I very much enjoyed the challenge of researching the issues in depth which currently face our vocational training system.

What I discovered was that this portfolio has some amazing things in common with other portfolio areas thanks to the mismanagement of the current Beattie government. What are these areas of commonality? In yet another area of government we have a crisis and a shortage. Instead of a water crisis and a water shortage, we are faced with a workforce crisis and a skills shortage. We have not heard the minister talk much about that.

Mr Barton: You are faced with a skills shortage, Sunshine.

Mr HOPPER: The crisis has been building for many years without any effective strategy to address this problem, and the minister knows that. There is no effective strategy to address this problem, and the minister is very well aware of that. So the minister can retire knowing that he has left Queensland with this crisis on its hands. The crisis has become so severe that the government has been forced to cobble together another glossy brochure which it is promoting as its solution to the problem.

Vocational education and training is one of the basic services of good government and is a high priority for the coalition. So much of our young people's futures depend on having ready access to high quality, relevant and affordable vocational training services. The proper functioning of our society depends on the community having the right numbers and mix of skills within its workforce to meet the changing and evolving needs. This has not been delivered in recent years under this government and certainly not by this minister.

In the short time I had dealing with this portfolio I had numerous representations from disillusioned students, teachers and employers associated with our current TAFE system. I have had letters from demoralised TAFE instructors who are disillusioned with the continual winding down of the system and the imminent retirement of many experienced TAFE teachers. It appears that very little is being done to stem the exodus of senior TAFE staff from the system. The government has not provided any proper incentive or thought to the future workforce requirements within TAFE to meet the growing need for vocational skills training.

I have had correspondence from students who are frustrated that courses they wish to pursue are no longer available to them at convenient times or locations. The concept of 'flexible delivery' is one to which only lip-service is being given in the current TAFE system. Most frustrating of all for me is that I had approaches from employers who are keen to support and to subsidise additional training for their employees but who find that they are faced with a rigid system which will only offer relevant courses at

times which are suitable to its own bureaucratic needs and not geared towards the requirements of students and their employers. These are just some of the issues which I came up against in the few short weeks in which I was dealing with this portfolio. The minister is very lucky that I have been given another portfolio because I was really getting my teeth into this and he knows that I was.

Mr Barton interjected.

Mr HOPPER: Here is the good part: to give the government its due, it has started to realise that there is a problem. In March this year it released its white paper, the Queensland Skills Plan. My theory is that this will be just another well meaning, glossy brochure.

Mr Barton interjected.

Mr HOPPER: We have got you stirred up, old mate. Just hang in there, you are nearly finished. This is typical of the kinds of responses we have seen in other areas in which this government has found itself in crisis, such as health and water. Of particular concern to me was the minister's response to a question I asked him about the level of funding to be provided under the Queensland Skills Plan. The government's press release in March this year trumpeted the plan in typical Beattie style as a billion dollar skills plan. We just heard the minister speak about it. He announced there would be \$542 million in new recurrent funding in a four-year period. When we came to examining the ministerial portfolio, it will be just \$26.31 million. When I questioned the minister about this during the hearings his answer was quite dismissive.

Time expired.