



Speech by

Karen Struthers

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

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VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Ms STRUTHERS (Algester—ALP) (4.29 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Vocational Education, Training and Employment and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2007. Queensland can proudly boast a world-class vocational education and training system and things can only get better. The billion-dollar Queensland Skills Plan has been the envy of other states and territories. Unlike the Howard federal government, which has done little to advance the skills development of Australians, the Queensland government has led Australia in funding and support for skills development. It can proudly boast record numbers of apprenticeships and traineeships and record numbers of vocational education training students in schools. For us, that means kids going to school for part of the week and then donning their electrical gear, their carpentry tools, or their chef's apron and heading out to the workforce and picking up a certificate, or a traineeship in a work area, particularly in those areas of skills shortages, which is what we need them to be doing. In that regard, Queensland has been leading the way. This bill provides further mechanisms and support for that sort of training to get better and better.

In Queensland we know that the key to the ongoing success of our economy and productivity is skilling up our workforce. Again, I want to put it on the record very clearly how disturbing are the Howard government's WorkChoices policy and industrial relations laws. Its approach to Australian productivity is to line the pockets of big business and to make it really tough for workers—to short-change workers as a way of increasing productivity. It is not rational and it does not make sense. In fact, it is downright very tough for a lot of working families to survive in this environment. The reality is that we have to focus on skills. The sooner the Howard government gets that and starts to fund more skills development, the better this country will be. Research is also very important, but the Howard government is misguided in its WorkChoices industrial laws.

The success of the Queensland policy framework that is extended through this bill with the rollout of the new industry alliances and other mechanisms that will follow is really the way to go. We have had a system of training advisory councils and their success has been variable. Some have worked well. I have been involved in the Community Services and Health Industries Training Council and their activities. Prior to being elected I was also an active member of the community services sector. A lot of good training and advice to government comes through that type of council. Other councils have not necessarily been as ready, willing and able to provide good support to their own members and to government in terms of advice. That has occurred for a range of reasons. But the mechanisms that we are putting in place now will not be a one size fits all; there will be skills formation strategies and a whole lot of mechanisms that will allow industry to provide support to its own members, to know what the skills needs are and to provide good advice to government.

I am very clear in my support of this bill. I am very keen to support the minister in his efforts to advance the skills development of Queenslanders. I am really thrilled to see new initiatives such as the Trade and Technician Skills Institute at Acacia Ridge, with centres at Eagle Farm and also in regional TAFEs. It is a great initiative. I commend Steve Ghost and the staff of the institute at Acacia Ridge for the wonderful work that they have done in such a short period. It is quite incredible. I visited the site when it

was a steel mill. Workers were concerned because they were going to be displaced from that mill when it closed down. Thankfully, this good Queensland Labor government had a worker assistance program in place by which to help those workers relocate and retrain, if that is what they wanted to do. Now, the site is a vibrant new space—a very Smart State initiative. The Trade and Technician Skills Institute at Acacia Ridge is certainly something of which we can very proud. I support this bill and wish the minister well in advancing the skills of Queenslanders.