



Speech by

**Rosa Lee Long**

**MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS**

Hansard Tuesday, 30 October 2007

---

## **VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT AND OTHER AMENDMENT BILL**

**Ms LEE LONG** (Tablelands—ONP) (8.35 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the debate on the Vocational Education, Training and Employment and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2007. This bill is aimed primarily at creating a legislative framework for the establishment and operation of TAFE institutes as statutory authorities. There are also amendments to the Libraries Act 1988, the Queensland Art Gallery Act 1987, the Queensland Museum Act 1970, the Queensland Performing Arts Trust Act 1977 and the Queensland Theatre Company Act 1970 which are all to provide for the terms and conditions of appointment for their relevant CEOs to be decided by the Governor in Council.

The growing shortage of Australian trained and qualified people is rapidly developing into a major factor for many Queenslanders. It has been said that if nothing changes the shortages will be catastrophic by 2010. These shortages are driving up the cost of building or owning a home, the cost of maintenance and repairs and so on. People in the far north are still waiting weeks and months to get a tradesman. I personally have had to wait three or four weeks just to get an electrician to do some repair work.

Coupled with the shortages, up go the prices. Supply and demand is what dictates the price. There are shortages of tradespeople, shortages of health professionals, shortages of rental properties and the cost of living goes up and the standard of living goes down. It goes hand in hand. The voracious appetite of the mining sector for engineers, operators, electricians, almost anyone with a trade is also having an impact. Even a fencing contractor has had to offer high hourly rates just to get and keep workers. There was a media report only today in which the Housing Industry Association of Queensland was quoted as saying that shortages of contractors have driven house prices up by some 8.5 per cent in the past year. I think that 8.5 per cent would be very conservative indeed.

I know that after Cyclone Larry when tradesmen from the south came up to help out some were shocked at the low rates the northern tradespeople were charging. One told me that it was about time the north got into the real world and charged the same as the southern tradespeople were charging. As it was, for that particular trade the price went up from something around \$14 per square metre to around \$55 per square metre and some went as high as \$100 per square metre. That is what happens when there is a shortage of anything, whether it be tradespeople, materials, food, fuel or whatever.

The Queensland Skills Plan has outlined major reforms to this state's vocational education and training system with the stated aim of revitalising TAFE by making it more flexible and responsive to industry and business needs. It is important, however, that at all stages TAFE remains closely in tune not only with the needs of employers but also with the needs of our youth. I believe employers should be given far more incentives and encouragement to take on more apprentices and to skill up the youth of this state.

The explanatory notes detail how the amendments before us today are aimed at allowing TAFE to compete better with a range of private training providers now operating in the field. Under the proposals in this bill the TAFE colleges will remain Public Service entities and will not become government owned corporations. However, the advisory councils will be replaced by institute boards with more of a commercial focus. Each institute will ultimately be accountable to the minister and have stringent

performance targets and monitoring arrangements. Finally, these changes will be introduced through a phased transition.

A secondary objective is that it will position TAFE institutes to help eligible students to access Commonwealth FEE-HELP. To do this, the institutes will obtain provider approval under the Commonwealth Higher Education Support Act 2003. This Commonwealth loan scheme helps full fee-paying students and is paid directly to the educational providers. The loan is repaid by the students through the taxation system once their income rises above the threshold level. This scheme has been in place for some time for public and private university students and has only recently been extended to full fee-paying students in vocational education and training fields. It is to be hoped that the cost of TAFE courses does not go through the roof, as have some university courses, and that these courses will still be affordable to most ordinary working Queensland families. This scheme is expected to take effect from 1 January next year and will ensure that eligible young Queenslanders can access TAFE courses.

There is an underlying problem which needs to be addressed, and that is the illusion that this country is nearing full employment. I know that for some groups, in particular the long-term unemployed, agencies which did succeed in finding them jobs that ran for several consecutive months considered that they had found those people full-time employment. In practice, that could mean that people who had been placed on fruit-picking jobs for the season were officially registered as being fully employed when in actual fact after the season they went back to being unemployed. I believe there is a reservoir of good, honest Australians buried and largely ignored in this kind of opportunistic accounting who would jump at the chance at being trained in a decent trade and have an opportunity to build themselves a real future. I also believe this would be the case for many people in rural and remote communities, including Indigenous Queenslanders. There is a tremendous pool of labour and talent in those communities and it is to be hoped that these changes will allow for far better mainstream engagement and a more normalised future for many.

One Nation has consistently argued that all Australians and all Queenslanders should have the same opportunities and receive the same support from government. It is to be hoped that this rearrangement of TAFE to allow students to access the federal FEE-HELP scheme will bring a better future to as many of our underemployed or unemployed as possible. I support the bill.