



Speech by

Tim Nicholls

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

Hansard Wednesday, 31 October 2007

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr NICHOLLS (Clayfield—Lib) (12.25 pm): I am happy to speak in support of the Vocational Education, Training and Employment and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. As many speakers have said, the object of the bill is to establish a TAFE model known as a statutory TAFE institute. The new institutes are designed to allow greater flexibility to TAFE colleges to meet the demands of the ever-changing market—a market where demand for skills is booming and skills themselves are in short supply.

I recently travelled to Gladstone to attend the taxi industry council annual conference. I spent a couple of days up there and had a good look around. While there I met the mayor, Peter Corones, and also spoke to Lorna McGinnis of the Gladstone Area Promotion and Development Ltd—the body charged with promoting the Gladstone area. I have some interesting facts and figures, and the member for Gladstone actually touched on a few of them. But my understanding is that the number of projects in Gladstone is enormous. From memory, some \$12 billion in works is currently planned, approved or underway in and around the Gladstone area. Rio Tinto Yarwun is about to embark on the second stage of the alumina refinery there, and it will need some 1,200 skilled workers during construction. This is in a town with an unemployment rate of around two per cent.

Gladstone Area Promotion and Development Ltd says that it is not just looking for new projects to undertake but also skilled employees to build and work in them. There is an enormous shortage up there and the competition amongst employers is enormous. The competition is so fierce that wages are increasing. Housing is becoming an issue in the Gladstone area, where there is a shortage, because they cannot get people to work in the construction industry to build houses. They are all working in the construction industry to build these enormous projects which are coming online. If anything demonstrates the shortage of skills that are available out there, a quick visit to Gladstone will illuminate that to anyone who is not aware of it. There is an enormous amount of work going on. The work on RG Tanna, the opening of the fourth coal port, means enormous growth.

But it is not just in those industries where there is a shortage of skills and the supply is drying up. I mentioned that I was at the taxi industry council conference. The taxi industry cannot get enough drivers to drive their vehicles, and that is causing problems. That has impacts on service delivery rates and all the other issues that arise in terms of taxis.

We know about the recent furphy in south-east Queensland regarding the number of train cancellations due to the flu and so on. The train cancellations are still going on while the flu season is well and truly over. We know that train drivers are in short supply and Citytrain drivers are being transferred to QR National to keep the coal running from the mines to the ports to get out of the place. That is an ongoing issue in relation to the provision of skills in those areas.

That is the story I am hearing repeated across the state. Skilled workers, who are the backbone of our state, who are the backbone of the industries and the economic boom that we are enjoying at the moment, are in short supply. It is important to provide a quality learning framework and facilities to allow

people to get those skills and enable them to expand on those skills, too. There are other skills over and above those areas that I have already mentioned where we need to train more people.

Our TAFEs are one of the learning grounds, together with the private sector, but the TAFEs are probably one of the most comprehensive operations providing courses within numerous fields. I think, if my memory serves me correctly from the briefing notes, over 860 courses are offered by 13 TAFEs currently in Queensland. In my own electorate of Clayfield, the Brisbane North Institute of TAFE—I think it is now a SkillsTech campus—on Kingsford Smith Drive offers a range of certificates, diplomas, apprenticeships and traineeships that cover everything from travel and tourism to floristry. Right now the TAFE is advertising apprenticeships that it has available to fill. As the minister has pointed out, we are currently suffering from a tight labour market, skills shortages and the lowest levels of unemployment in 30 years.

The federal coalition government, under the strong leadership of John Howard, has done such a great job in creating jobs for Australians over the past 11 years that we are now struggling to fill those jobs. It is an unfortunate fact that with low unemployment it becomes harder to fill those skilled positions which may not always seem as financially attractive as perhaps some of the more well-paying positions that we hear talk about. Yet our state relies on the valuable skills of our child-care workers, retail managers, builders and mechanics, to name just a few. Although this legislation is welcomed, it again highlights the sluggish way this government reacts to issues. It is always dragged kicking and screaming to fix problems, whether they be problems with health, water security, kids in care, public transport, roads infrastructure—the list goes on. This government is very slow off the mark. Now it is skills training that is in strife.

By contrast, the federal coalition has long recognised the need to address this skills issue. From revitalising the apprenticeship program to the Investing in our Schools Program, the federal government has acted practically and in a timely way to address the skills shortage. In 2004 the federal coalition announced the policy to build Australian technical colleges. Some \$500 million was allocated for 28 of them and 21 are now operating. On the weekend the federal coalition announced another instalment plan for \$2.1 billion worth of investment in 100 new Australian technical colleges. Thirty brand-new colleges will be established and 70 existing state and independent schools can access up to \$10 million to convert to specialist training colleges. This will provide an enormous number of additional skilled people when those colleges come on stream in the next couple of years. This will address the skills shortage.

The government also announced \$392 million for vouchers to extend the Work Skills Voucher program via \$3,000 vouchers being issued to an estimated 110,000 students. The program, which began in January this year, has already issued 45,000 vouchers. We know that this is a popular program and we know it is supported because this state government is endorsing it. In fact, one of the reasons for the policy behind this bill is the ability to access the voucher program run by the federal government. I congratulate the minister for endorsing the voucher program and moving to amend the legislation to allow access to that particular program which we know is popular and which will, as announced on the weekend, be extended at a significant cost of \$392 million. The federal government has announced that 100,000 small business training vouchers will be issued at a cost of \$168 million. The federal government is working well to provide the training that is necessary and the technical colleges. I am glad you agree, Mr Deputy Speaker. I like to see someone paying attention when I am speaking.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): I am not agreeing with you at all.

Mr NICHOLLS: Then you need some more training, Mr Deputy Speaker, because a nod is always taken as acceptance.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: You would be best advised not to reflect on the chair.

Mr NICHOLLS: I take your word on that, but you should be agreeing with me because the work is being done and the money is being spent. From revitalising the apprenticeship program to investing in colleges to providing vouchers to employers to providing vouchers to employees to making sure that people are there to meet the jobs needs in the future, the federal government is well ahead of the game and moving on.

Mr Shine: They are moving on all right.

Mr NICHOLLS: I have heard that interjection before. I heard it in 2001 and I heard it in 2004. I take the member for Toowoomba North at his word. I know he means it in all the best ways. I have heard it before. There is still a long way to go in this campaign.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge another initiative of this government—that is, the development of Aviation High. I attended the Aviation High awards ceremony at Hendra yesterday evening. Aviation High is part of the program to link high schools with certain industries. It is one that was promised by the state government during the election campaign. It was officially launched by the minister and the then Premier in August. I want to acknowledge the great work that principal Phil Cooper and his deputies, Allan Head and Glen Donald, have done. I also want to make particular mention of a couple of heads of department—Mrs Sue Smith and Mr Rob Buckner, whom I have had a fair bit to do with over the

last six or seven years. I particularly mention Mrs Deb Buckner, who organised last night's event and did a great job to make sure the awards ceremony went very smoothly.

There were quite a number of award recipients and I will not go through them all. I want to make mention of a number of people who received awards. I also want to pay tribute to the sponsors, because their involvement in Aviation High is essential to the success of that particular undertaking. I had this discussion with Mr Cooper last night. I want to acknowledge Beau Nicholson, who was the year 12 certificate of merit winner. I acknowledge the middle school achievement awards made to Elisha Ulbrich, Harrison Bain, Melanie Kaasinen, Rachel Long, Pierson Morna and Christopher Scafidi. The Sportsperson of the Year was Jocelyn Race. The Worklinks School Based Traineeship Award went to Krystal Hilmi. The Worklinks Structured Workplace Learning Award went to Justin Rosenberg. The community service awards—it is not just about what they do at school but how they interact with their community—went to Tanya Herne and Justin Rosenberg. The cultural awards went to Shannon Andrewartha, Natalie Hyde, Tanya Herne and Rachel Long. The Caltex Best All-Rounder Award went to Tanya Herne. The Spirit of Boeing Award went to Tanya Herne.

There was also the Virgin Blue High Altitude Award for Academic Excellence awarded to Jake Taylor. This is a prize that anyone would like to win. Two return tickets anywhere in Australia and \$500 spending money goes to the dux of Aviation High. What a great incentive it is to achieve that. Congratulations to Virgin Blue. I must say that if they had had that sort of award when I was at school I might have worked a bit harder.

Mr Hinchliffe: I don't think so.

Mr NICHOLLS: Probably not.

Mr Hinchliffe interjected.

Mr NICHOLLS: The member for Stafford, who is interjecting not from his seat but I will take it anyway, knows that I am not motivated by personal gain or monetary profit, unlike some other people. My altruistic aims run true and strong. What a great prize that would be for someone who was so motivated. Perhaps the member for Stafford might know someone like that.

There was also the announcement of the 2008 school leaders. The school captains will be Chloe Absalom and Benjamin McIntyre. The school vice-captains will be Shannon Andrewartha and Andrew Pratt. I should also make mention of a bursary. There were some students from Hamilton State School here for the Order of Australia presentations on Monday. I was talking to one of them who is in year 7 who has actually won one of the Virgin Blue bursary awards to go to Aviation High next year. Virgin Blue has allocated \$1,500 to bursary recipients to go to Aviation High next year. Those recipients are Callum Borgert, Lana McKenna, Aaron Prasad and from Hamilton State School Donna Bowden and Rebecca Keasey. The 2008 year 11 bursary award winners were Jacob Willmot, Chivelle Calver-Christiansen and Felix Duffy.

I have perhaps gone on a bit about Aviation High, but I am convinced that this is one of the ways we need to move forward. We need to link our higher education and our learning centres with industry to develop the industries they need. Many people from Aviation High are now being offered the opportunity to go on into the aerospace industries, whether it be training up as cabin crew or ground staff or training to be engineering mechanics linking in with Aviation Australia at the Da Vinci Centre at the airport. It is a great program. It is something that the former principal, Ros Parkes, did such a great job in bringing to fruition. The school's new uniforms come on stream next year. I inform the minister that it is a bit behind on its building program, but it hopes to have that up and running next year for its new flight simulator which it will be putting in. There are some really exciting things occurring there. That is a great outcome in that part of the world. With those few words, I commend the bill to the House.