



Speech by

Hon. Neil Roberts

MEMBER FOR NUDGE

Hansard Wednesday, 5 August 2009

APPROPRIATION BILLS: ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B

Hon. NS ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services) (4.17 pm): In speaking to the report of Estimates Committee B, I firstly want to thank the committee chair, the member for Ipswich West, and all of the committee members for the work that they did and also the parliamentary support staff for their input during the estimates process. Before reaffirming some of the more positive aspects of both of my portfolios in terms of police and community safety, I want to respond to a number of the reservations which have been raised by both the member for Gregory, the shadow police spokesperson, and also the member for Mirani.

I might just point out at the outset that the member for Gregory was caught out during the estimates process when he issued a media release part way through the estimates hearing which, based on his incorrect interpretation of the proportion of operational police, made a claim which was blatantly wrong. It was corrected during the hearing but, despite that, the media release still went out and I note that no correction has yet been made to the record on that matter. The member for Gregory raised six reservations about the Police and Corrective Services portfolio, three of which related to the timing and the format of the committee hearing. In concert with a number of other members, it seems that it is almost a pro forma submission. However, I also note that the member stated in his reservations that I was evasive and confrontational in my approach to the hearings which, of course, I reject outright. I never thought that I would have to use these words to describe the member for Gregory, but on the basis of the claim that he has made I think that you could say that he is nothing but a precious little petal when it comes to this particular issue.

The member for Gregory also alleged that I used partial statistics in response—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr ROBERTS: I am sorry the member is not here to hear me say that.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr ROBERTS: I am sure he will be impressed. The member also alleged that I used partial statistics in responses to questions which, of course, I reject outright. The Police Commissioner, the director-general of Community Safety and the other commissioners who were available answered the questions that were asked both on notice and during the hearing.

The first reservation of the shadow minister for emergency services regards the lack of new community safety programs. I stand by the decision that I made some time ago to refocus the attention of the department of emergency services to front-line services. There was a significant shift in resources away from some important but non-essential areas to the front line. Just to give an example of how that has resulted in a significant change, at the time of the audit the proportion of operational ambulance staff was 77.6 per cent. That was in around 2006-07. Now the proportion of operational staff is 82.5 per cent, which demonstrates a significant structural shift within the organisation from non-operational staff to

operational staff. Yes, one of the issues there was the withdrawal of some areas of community safety, but I stand by that decision.

The member for Mirani also used his statement of reservations to again undermine public confidence in the three new Agusta Westland 139 rescue helicopters. He has been doing this continuously over the past 12 months. These helicopters can fly faster and further and they are bigger and have greater capacity in terms of emergency responses than the Bell 412 helicopters that they replaced. In fact, we still have Bell 412 helicopters. We have three new Agusta Westlands and two Bell 412s in our fleet. The fact is that both the shadow minister for police and corrective services and the shadow minister for emergency services were not really able to find much fault in the emergency services and police budgets.

As a government we made the tough decision, in very difficult economic times, to significantly increase the budgets of both of those departments—in fact, by 8.5 per cent and 8.4 per cent respectively. The Queensland Police Service budget of \$1.7 billion will deliver an additional 203 police positions this financial year. We have given a commitment to maintain the police-to-population ratio at least equal to or better than the national average. So that will mean a minimum of 600 additional police positions over the next 12 months. I want to thank the committee for the work that it undertook through the estimates process and commend the departmental budgets to the House.

(Time expired)