




Speech by

Tim Mulherin

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Hansard Wednesday, 31 October 2012

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL AND APPROPRIATION BILL: EDUCATION AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

 **Mr MULHERIN** (Mackay—ALP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (9.30 pm): I would like to congratulate the chair on the way she conducted the estimates process. I would also like to thank the estimates committee secretariat for the hard work and effort they put into making sure that the scrutiny of the budget was carried out in a way that enabled members of this chamber an opportunity to question the executive. I would like to comment now on the estimates hearing.

When the minister was asked what employment programs were still being run other than a phone line for retrenched public servants, the minister was not able to outline any. This follows cuts to employment programs, including Skilling Queenslanders for Work, of \$287.7 million over four years. The minister could only point to the LNP's four per cent unemployment target which is not included as a budget target anywhere in the minister's Service Delivery Statements. When asked about why there was no four per cent unemployment target set out in the budget papers, the minister went on a tirade against the previous government without providing an answer.

In response to questions from the opposition leader, the director-general of education advised that the Deloitte Access Economics report on the evaluation of Skilling Queenslanders for Work was received one week after making a decision to cut the program. The director-general confirmed that there was knowledge of the report being prepared prior to the decision to axe the program. This is symptomatic of a rushed policy process under the LNP government which is based on ideology rather than evidence.

The minister in an answer to non-government question on notice No. 1 even highlighted the achievements of the program, including having assisted 116,836 disadvantaged job seekers into employment from July 2007 to 30 June 2012. The minister further stated that no-one questions the worthiness of the programs. The minister's only justification provided for cutting employment programs was that he believed the Commonwealth to be responsible for employment while maintaining it in his ministerial title.

The minister repeatedly told the committee that the participation rate in the workforce had increased. This is despite the participation rate in September being the lowest since April 2006 as set out on the Australian Bureau of Statistics and Queensland Treasury websites. When asked about this, the minister pointed out he was referring to the national participation rate and not Queensland's despite his previous comments being in the context of Queensland.

The minister was then asked what Treasury's projected employment growth is for this financial year and the projected unemployment rate in four years. Both these figures are clearly set out on page 34 of Budget Paper No. 2. Despite the public availability of these figures and how crucial they are to understanding employment and the LNP's four per cent unemployment target, the minister was unable to answer either of these questions or even direct to where the figures are located in the budget papers.

The minister was asked to provide advice on how many jobs would need to be created within the final two years of the LNP's four per cent unemployment target for it to be met. Treasury currently project an unemployment rate in four years time of 5¼ per cent. The minister responded by refusing to take the question on notice and then referring to a report by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations which contained employment forecasts over the next five years. The LNP's unemployment target is over six years and the number of jobs that would need to be created to lower unemployment from 5¼ per cent to four per cent over the final two years remains a mystery.

The minister was asked what plan he had to lower unemployment beyond hoping for the factors outlined in the budget of a weakening Australian dollar and a global economic recovery. The minister was unable to provide any practical solutions beyond hollow rhetoric about how much he talks to the Treasurer after earlier saying he did not know unemployment figures because that was the Treasurer's responsibility. He is the minister for employment.

The estimates hearing into the portfolio of Science, Information Technology, Innovation and the Arts highlighted that the minister charged with managing these important areas of responsibility is either ignorant of or incapable of understanding the major issues. The minister's answers to questions on notice revealed cuts of more than \$25 million in 2012-13 to grants programs in her department. The majority of the cuts came in programs designed to boost innovation. The minister failed to provide the requested information in response to non-government question on notice No. 4. This is in contrast to some other ministers who did manage to provide a list of job titles and regions for positions abolished in their own departments.

(Time expired)