




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Record of Proceedings, 16 August 2016

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Hon. G GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, Minister for Racing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (4.13 pm): I rise to address the tabled report of the parliamentary Finance and Administration Committee. I want to acknowledge the work of all members on the committee, particularly the chair, the member for Sunnybank. I thank them all for their contribution. This was my first estimates hearing and, since, the government's employment initiative—our \$100 million Back to Work regional jobs package—has been officially rolled out and support payments to regional businesses are already being made. There is a strong industry interest in regional Queensland in our Back to Work program. I look forward to updating the House later this week on the benefits it is bringing to local communities, including the doubling of the payroll tax rebate for taking on an apprentice or trainee.

Back to Work aims to give the unemployed in the regions a greater opportunity at getting a new job. That is a great thing. That is why it is regionally targeted and far superior to any alternative plans of those opposite. In fact, when I was being questioned at the estimates hearing about why the program is targeting the regions, it was interesting to watch the two regional opposition members on the committee. Their body language was very loud because like this government they knew that regional Queensland is where the greatest need and challenges are and that this program is rightly focused. It was interesting that their body language said a lot when we were being questioned in regard to that issue.

The opposition's ill-conceived and poorly thought out jobs plan on the run lacks adequate financial incentives and would be hampered by a lack of on-the-ground delivery and coordination. To make matters worse, it targets incentives at the wrong end of the employment and training cycle. It is no use promising apprentices \$500 vouchers at the end of an apprenticeship; they need it at the beginning of an apprenticeship when they are actually on the job. Can I remind those opposite of something they are having difficulty understanding? A voucher to buy tools is not a job. I just remind them of that.

Over the last 18 months the Palaszczuk government has worked hard to restore fairness to Queensland workplaces. When in office, those opposite ran roughshod over Queensland workers, sacking thousands of public sector employees and stripping them of hard fought entitlements. They refused to negotiate in good faith with Queensland public sector workers and it was left up to us to conclude fair and reasonable enterprise agreements with the majority of the state's public sector workers, in line with the government's wages policy.

Those opposite also continued to demonise unions and the workers they represent. Of course I meet regularly with unions who are representing their workers, just as I also meet with business and industry groups. That is what any reasonable industrial relations minister would do, and I will continue to meet with all relevant stakeholders. If they wish for those meetings be kept in private, I will respect their wishes.

The CFMEU are obviously part of the union movement. The problem of deadly asbestos imports has been brought to the national attention by them. I applaud them for carrying out testing which detected asbestos-containing materials on major building sites, including 1 William Street in Brisbane. The Palaszczuk government has a zero-tolerance approach to asbestos. We target the immediate removal of this material when detected and pursue prosecutions where possible. This problem needs to be tackled at its source. We simply should not be seeing items such as children's crayons, car spare parts and building materials containing asbestos entering the country in the first place. The federal government needs to address this issue as a priority.

We conducted the first major review of Queensland's industrial laws in nearly 20 years through an extensive consultation process with all stakeholders. I look forward to introducing new laws into the House in coming weeks in line with the recommendations of the review. We have a strong workers compensation system. We have made excellent changes which see firefighters now receiving benefits that otherwise they may not have been entitled to. We see workers who were denied their benefits and common law under the previous government now being paid.

There is no greater supporter of the Queensland racing industry than the Palaszczuk government. I was at Eagle Farm on Saturday. Let me tell the House that the feedback on what we have been doing with racing is the complete opposite to what the member for Beaudesert mentioned here today. They are more than happy with the board. They are more than happy with QRIC. More importantly, they are more than happy with the way this government is handling racing.

(Time expired)