



Speech By  
**Leanne Linard**

**MEMBER FOR NUDGE**

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Record of Proceedings, 21 August 2019


## **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL**

### **APPROPRIATION BILL**

#### **Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)**

#### **Appropriation Bill**

#### **Education, Employment and Small Business Committee, Report**

 **Ms LINARD** (Nudgee—ALP) (2.45 pm): I rise to speak to the Education, Employment and Small Business Committee's report on the 2019-20 budget estimates process. The committee made one recommendation: that the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

It was a pleasure to chair the estimates hearing for the committee again this year, covering service areas so core to this government's jobs and skills agenda and the prosperity of all Queenslanders. The 2019-20 budget continues our government's investment in job-generating infrastructure and record spending in core services essential to meet the needs of our growing state. It means more teachers and teacher aides and investment in our schools, TAFE and apprenticeship and skills programs to make sure that we have the people with the right skills to take advantage of the opportunities created by economic growth across the state. As the Deputy Premier and Treasurer said during her budget speech, budgets are fundamentally about choices and the choice that we continue to make as a state Labor government is the prosperity of Queensland workers, their families and their businesses.

A record \$1.4 billion will be spent building new state schools and refurbishing, maintaining and expanding existing state schools across Queensland in 2019-20. This includes funding for an additional 1,000 teachers and over 200 extra teacher aides in classrooms across our great state; an additional \$30 million to support universal access to kindergarten; the continued implementation of the digital technologies curriculum, including coding and robotics in every state school; and \$100 million for priority state school air-conditioning projects following a review of state school needs—a big agenda by a minister who can deliver it. I take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank that minister, the Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister Grace Grace, not only for her investment in students across the length and breadth of our state but also for the commitments made in this budget in my electorate of Nudgee at both Boondall and Nundah state schools.

During the hearing, I took the opportunity to ask questions about these commitments, as I did in regard to the industrial relations portfolio to raise an issue near to my heart in respect of wage theft following the inquiry I chaired last year. Although the minister has supported every recommendation in that report at a state level—and I acknowledge her long history of championing the cause of workers in this state—we continue to see no relief at a federal level for the hundreds and thousands of workers in this state not receiving their proper entitlements each and every year. That is a national shame.

Free TAFE, payroll tax initiatives and discounts, Skilling Queenslanders for Work, Back to Work, Advancing Small Business grants, on-time payments, Supporting Artisan Producers and, lastly, again something close to my heart and my electorate, the Social Enterprise Strategy are all initiatives that are focused, as we are as a government, on creating the right conditions for small businesses to invest, grow and employ in this state and for Queenslanders to get the skills they need to get a job or keep their job. I acknowledge the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development, Shannon Fentiman, who is very passionate about her portfolio, clearly evidenced by the stories that she often tells and told during the estimates committee hearing of real Queenslanders benefiting from these programs.

Parliamentary estimates committees serve an important role in the concept of responsible government and their associated departments, and that is particularly so in our parliament, being a unicameral system. Estimates committee hearings provide an opportunity to scrutinise the immediate past and present budget expenditure in the public interest, but that purpose is not served when almost 75 per cent of questions asked by the opposition of the day are directed not to ministers, who are popularly and democratically elected, but to an appointed director-general or CEO. That is what happened yet again in this year's budget estimates hearing for this committee.

In 2011, when the Parliament of Queensland (Reform and Modernisation) Amendment Bill 2011 was passed that allowed chief executive officers to be directly questioned, I do not believe that the parliament envisaged that the role of ministers would predominantly become one of handing briefing notes to directors-general while they carry out the estimates hearing. With an estimated 82 of 111 non-government questions asked during our hearing directed to the director-general or a CEO, that is exactly what transpired.

To be clear, my criticism is not of the 2011 reforms; I absolutely appreciate their impetus and importance. Questions of a purely operational nature more appropriately put to DGs and CEOs should be allowed to be put directly, but what our committee saw again this year, particularly in regard to the portfolio area of employment, small business and skills, was an experienced minister across her brief sit and listen to her director-general peppered with unsystematic questions, which leaves but one question: why are the opposition so scared of our ministers? I commend the report to the House.