




Speech By
Barry O'Rourke

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL
APPROPRIATION BILL
Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)
Appropriation Bill

Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee, Report

 **Mr O'ROURKE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (4.09 pm): I rise to speak to the Education, Employment, Training and Skills Committee's examination of the Appropriation Bill 2024-25 and the budget estimates for our committee areas of responsibility. I congratulate the ministers, their staff and the government employees from the various departments. All were very well prepared and I appreciate the large amount of work that takes place in preparation.

Minister Farmer in her opening statement spoke of the importance of the joint portfolios of education and youth justice. Education can give all Queensland children the best start in life and it is a Labor government that believes that, no matter who you are or where you are in Queensland, you deserve the same access to high-quality education. This is backed with a record \$20.9 billion education budget.

To give our kids the best start, the Miles government has implemented programs like the Putting Queensland Kids First strategy to give children that good start from conception; a youth engagement strategy, recognising that not all children can thrive in mainstream classrooms; a record \$1.3 billion capital works budget; Go for Gold; another two new schools to open in 2025, bringing the total to 29 new schools since 2015, and that is in direct contrast to the LNP when there were no additional schools—there were not even any additional classrooms and it sold schools off; Labor's commitment to hiring 2,000 specialist staff to provide wraparound support for students with disabilities in schools; our \$15 million School and Community Food Relief Program; and our GPs in Schools program.

Not every child who is disengaged from education is in the youth justice system, but every child in the youth justice system is disengaged from education. The minister spoke of the elements of the \$288 million youth engagement program and why it is so critical. She also announced the newest of those elements—24 new FlexiSpaces, adding to the 34 already announced this year, including seven in primary schools and two in primary-secondary school clusters.

Minister McCallum spoke of the \$1.5 billion investment in skills and training, employment and small business. Queensland is the nation's employment powerhouse. In Queensland more than one million people are employed by small businesses, and that is why we have our new Queensland Small Business Strategy—a \$250 million package of programs to support our small businesses. The budget also included funds for the appointment of the new Night-Life Economy Commissioner, who will work closely with local businesses, live-music venues and entertainment precincts to create a vibrant and safe night-life environment.

In the training and skills area it is planned to deliver one million subsidised training places for Queensland. This budget has locked in \$203 million over two years with the Queensland Skills Strategy. We know that free TAFE has been changing lives and our economy, so under the strategy we are providing funding for 70,000 places, thanks to the \$162.6 million over three years. To build more homes for Queenslanders, we have also opened the free construction apprenticeships and are providing \$1,000 worth of free tools to first-year tradies through rebates. All of these programs are at risk under an LNP government.

Finally, I want to thank the committee secretariat and parliamentary staff for their assistance throughout the estimates process. Well done to all. I also want to thank my fellow committee members. It has been a good opportunity for all.