



Speech by

Mr JIM PEARCE

MEMBER FOR FITZROY

Hansard 17 September 1998

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL
APPROPRIATION BILL**

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (9.15 p.m.): The Budget announced on Tuesday by Treasurer David Hamill delivers \$380m worth of election promises. The \$16 billion Budget relies on 3.3% revenue growth to cover capital works, both old and new initiatives, across Government. This Budget is jobs focused and is a step towards Labor's jobs target. The Budget also commits Labor in Government to social responsibilities—responsibilities that we in the Labor Party take great pride in meeting.

Importantly for the people of Queensland, there are no new taxes or increased taxes in the Budget. No doubt there will be tax rises in line with inflation, but there are no deliberate increases for the purpose of raising additional revenue. The people of Queensland can feel comfortable about the Budget as it has been put together with a jobs focus and a strong commitment from Labor to getting the balance right between social and fiscal responsibilities.

The rhetoric of Budget announcements always creates an interest in the public arena, but it is the ability of the Government to deliver the capital works and new funding initiatives that gains the respect of the community. I know that the Premier, the Treasurer and Ministers in the Labor Government will be taking their departments by the throat and using all their resources to deliver to the people.

As the member of a rural and mining based electorate in central Queensland, I am pleased with the Budget outcome. I would have liked to have achieved more for my electorate, but we have to remember that the Fitzroy electorate within the Fitzroy region is only a part of this large and diverse State. The Fitzroy and central-west region has been allocated \$509,237,000 for capital outlays in 1998-99, \$261.9m for transport related infrastructure and \$111.6m for mining, energy and electricity infrastructure. The estimated per capita expenditure for the region is \$2,653.

Mr Reynolds: It is the best in the State.

Mr PEARCE: Yes, we are leading the State and so we should; we put a lot into revenue. The per capita expenditure for other regions is as follows: Wide Bay/Burnett, \$1,411 per capita; the south-east corner, \$1,455 per capita; the Mackay and northern region, \$1,848 per capita; and the far north and north west region, \$2,177. On a per capita basis, the Fitzroy and central-west region does well out of the Budget, receiving \$500 more per head of population than the far north and north western region and \$1,198 more than the south-east corner.

I raise that point today because I am often approached by people who feel that our region misses out badly, especially after consideration of the revenue generated from the region through primary industries, mining and tourism. Certainly there are greater numbers of people in the south-east corner, which reduces per capita dollar expenditure. The Government has to try to spread the people's money evenly across the State, addressing the needs of more Queenslanders. Unfortunately, some people do not understand that we have a Statewide responsibility rather than a regional responsibility.

I wish to move on and mention briefly some of the Budget commitments that will benefit the people of central Queensland and in particular the Fitzroy electorate. There are several satisfying outcomes for me: the deliberate focus on jobs, the commitment to fixing the disgraceful neglect of people with disabilities, the Cool Schools program, a police presence for Gracemere, the construction of

the Woorabinda health facility and free ambulance services for Seniors Card holders, pensioners and their dependants. Importantly, the \$4.8 billion Capital Works Program will provide job security for more than 47,000 workers and will create another 30,000 new jobs. In doing so, it will provide opportunities for those who have been without work. If those job numbers can be sustained, that will lead to confidence and a feeling of hope. I am hopeful that some of these jobs will come to central Queensland.

The Budget puts in place the new direction for job creation and job security. This Labor Government is taking the first steps in meeting the challenge of job creation. We all know that the 5% target cited by the Premier during the lead-up to the election will be difficult for us in Government. However, I feel more comfortable about Labor's target for jobs than if we had no target at all. The Minister for Public Works and Housing, the member for Rockhampton, Rob Schwarten, and I will be looking to get our fair share of apprenticeships and traineeships for the region.

One of the most difficult issues for me as a local member has been the previous coalition Government's lack of understanding of the unmet needs of people with disabilities. I have personally met with many families and carers supporting people with disabilities in my electorate, and I have witnessed first-hand the dedication and commitment they provide. However, it can be tough and they need support to ensure that they can continue to provide a good quality of life for those in need. That is why I am delighted that this Labor Budget has honoured its election commitment to deliver an additional \$30m a year to address the high levels of unmet need for disability services in the community. This outstanding funding boost will not only improve the lives of many hundreds of people with disabilities and their families; it will create more than 800 jobs, including 300 in this financial year. The package includes additional funding for accommodation support, recreation and community access, and respite and family support services. I am particularly pleased that the funding will focus on people with disabilities and their families in rural and remote regional areas of Queensland. One has to visit rural communities and talk to people with disabilities and their families to gain an understanding of the real difficulties that they face because they live in an isolated rural community. They are unable to access services, and my experience is that that puts a great deal of pressure on a lot of those families.

Central Queensland students, staff and parents and citizens associations are applauding this Government's commitment to the airconditioning of schools. An additional \$42m over four years—\$6m in 1998-99—has been allocated to aircondition an extra 183 State schools and 47 non-State schools, most of which are in central Queensland, with some in north Queensland. Those schools fall within the boundaries of the old Capricornia region, which means that 33 schools in the Fitzroy electorate will now be eligible to apply for funds under the Cool Schools program. This was a Labor promise made in good faith that is now being delivered. The coalition chose to ignore the strong campaign initiated by the Cool Schools 2000 committee. The coalition did not listen. It showed that it did not care about the sons and daughters of young parents. The coalition showed that it did not care that students and teachers are forced to take classes in extreme heat conditions.

The State Government will contribute 75% of project costs. This means that schools will now be able to set about raising a realistic funding target. The issue for me now is to access funding for those schools that have in their airconditioning accounts sufficient dollars to qualify for the 75% subsidy. Several of the schools have already spent hundreds of thousands of dollars. They have raised part of the final instalment towards the completion of their projects, and a Government subsidy provided now will allow these schools to have the airconditioning project completed before the hot weather arrives. They have made the commitment and provided the money. They now need a helping hand to complete their projects. On behalf of the school students, staff and parents and citizens associations throughout our region, I record my appreciation for the funding allocation for airconditioning. We made the promise, we are delivering and everybody appreciates it.

Another big win for the people of my electorate is the Budget commitment of half a million dollars for the construction of two residences and a police station in Gracemere. The community has put faith in me as its local member and, thanks to the Police Minister, the Police Service and the Labor Government, we will deliver. We have campaigned long and hard for this police presence. We have sent letters to Ministers, and we have made statements and asked questions in the Parliament. We have been strongly supported by the media, and that has allowed us to keep the issue in the spotlight. We did not give up.

We promised a Police Beat when last in Government. I can recall that positions had been provided for, but the change of Government following the Mundingburra by-election saw the Police Beat program shelved. Within a week or two of winning Government, the Minister for Police was in Gracemere promising a police presence by June 1999. A budget line item in the Budget allocates the necessary dollars. It is in the Budget. The money is there and the promise will be delivered. The people of Gracemere and district are delighted.

Page 95 of Budget Paper No. 3 identifies \$4.483m for the construction of the new health facility for Woorabinda. When last in the Woorabinda community, I inspected the almost completed new

nurses' accommodation. These self-contained units are modern, comfortable and of a standard that should be available to the hardworking and committed health workers providing their expertise in isolated communities such as Woorabinda. Labor in Government commenced the planning process for the new facility. To its credit, the coalition in Government continued the process. However, it is Labor that will complete the construction and commissioning of the new health facility. I am thrilled to bits to know that it will be a Labor Minister who will be opening this new facility that will keep sick people in Woorabinda close to their families and the culture that they know. Mothers will be able to give birth in their local community.

The next initiative that I wish to touch on is the free ambulance service. This State Budget will provide \$15m for the funding of a free ambulance service for pensioners, seniors and their dependants, which will kick in from 1 January next year. This means that about 850,000 Queenslanders, including aged and disabled pensioners, Seniors Card holders and other pensioners and their dependants will benefit from the free service. It is important that those eligible for the free service do not let their ambulance cover lapse in the meantime as, if they require an ambulance and are not subscribers, they could face a very big bill. Non-subscribers are charged \$285, plus \$9.55 for every kilometre. The Queensland Ambulance Service has made a commitment to refund any oversubscriptions for those eligible for the free service from January next. That was another Labor promise. The funding is in the Budget. We are going to deliver on that promise.

As the member for Fitzroy, I am very pleased with the Budget outcome. We have certainly put a lot of work into getting some of these projects approved and the funding allocated. I am more than happy with the way in which the Treasurer has responded to our calls. I am sure that we will get on with the job and start looking for things to target next year.
