



Speech by

**Mrs E. CUNNINGHAM**

**MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE**

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Hansard 17 September 1998

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL**  
**APPROPRIATION BILL**

**Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—IND) (9.53 p.m.): It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise in this debate on the Appropriation Bills and to contribute to what I believe are two Budgets: this Budget and the Budget of the previous Government. As to those sections that have been rolled over into the current Government's Budget, my focus will be not only on the benefits to my electorate but on those that apply to the other people of this State. I pass on my appreciation to both sides of the House, because both have contributed to the current Budget.

A number of projects were funded under the previous Government and construction had actually started. As I said, those funds were transferred and re-presented in the current Budget. These include a long-overdue police station in Gladstone City. The construction of that is going along well. In fact, the Premier has had a look at that development. However, I raise one concern that the Mayor of Gladstone expressed in today's newspaper. He has a serious concern about the adequacy of parking in close proximity to the police station. Initially, the idea was to have a parking station under the police station, but that was done away with because of funding overruns. Now, the only parking is a little bit of off-street and on-street parking, so that may be a problem that will have to be confronted.

My disappointment, not only in the current Budget but in the previous Budget, was that there was no allocation for a Calliope police station. This is something about which I intend to speak again in this House. The Calliope police work out of a room that is smaller than most of our Parliament House offices. They have no privacy. If somebody comes in with a personal matter, either the police have to ask all other people to exit the police station, and then they do the interview, or the sergeant has to actually take that person into his private home and hold the interview there. That situation is really quite critical, and it has been for many, many years. As I said, it is a priority that was in neither Budget, but it certainly needs to be attended to.

I believe that the funding for the courthouse has been rolled over into this Budget from the Budget of the previous Government. Again, the current Premier inspected the courthouse site. In the run-up to the election, there was a campaign to continue with the police station development but stop the courthouse development. I know that, after his inspection of the current courthouse, the Premier understood why the previous Justice Minister supported the development of the new courthouse. The current one is certainly too small for the projected growth of the Gladstone area. It is even too small for the current population—let alone the fact that there are security problems for staff at the courthouse.

Funding for the hospital redevelopment was provided by both Governments. That project is developing well. The Minister for Health is coming up in a very short time to open the new wing. I know that the staff are really looking forward to that. All of the disruption that comes with a redevelopment was able to be coped with simply because the staff there and the users of the hospital facility could see that the end result was going to be so much better. The co-location is also progressing very well. I know that that is going to significantly improve the health facilities that are available to the local residents.

I also commend the funding for palliative care. The Budget states that there has been an increase to \$2.3m. This is a very sensitive area of health. In my electorate, the people who undertake

palliative care are the Red Cross, community health and hospital staff. They are a very special group of people. That have a compassion that is unparalleled. They are really dealing with end-of-life issues, not only with the patients but with their families. A lot of counselling, comforting and care has to go into it. So I congratulate any increase in funding in that sector.

Mental health service provision is a problem for my region. Our mental health staff work out of a demountable building. I always look at it and think that if I went in there with a mental health problem, I would probably come out with a worse one, because it is just so depressing. It is small. It is underresourced, simply because there is nowhere to put people. I know that they are looking for alternative accommodation at the moment. They are paying exorbitant rent for that building. That is incredible.

**Mrs Edmond:** Can you talk to me about it when I come up there?

**Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM:** Sure. The increased funding for HACC services is also welcome. One of the focuses is to keep people in their homes as long as possible. That can be as simple as appropriate ramping, appropriate safety precautions in bathrooms and that sort of thing. That can keep older couples together, and it can keep people in their family homes for much longer. They are mentally very happy to stay there. So the increases in that funding are very, very welcome.

I was pleased to see the continued funding of \$1m for the Central Queensland University Gladstone campus retained. I also welcome in the Education budget the inclusion of more of Queensland in the Cooler Schools program. When I went through the schools in my electorate that would be eligible, I could not see any that would be excluded. I thank the Minister for that. That includes the private schools as well. During the most recent hot summer, many parents were concerned about their children's welfare. I am sure we are not unique. We have a number of classrooms that are converted areas that are airlocked. They are enclosed, quite stuffy and there is no circulation. The Cooler Schools program will be greatly welcomed by the students, particularly in the summer months. I was pleased to see the continuing funding for the Boyne Island general learning half block.

Tonight we have had a debate about firefighters. I will include ambulance officers in my comments. They are at the forefront of our emergency services. Funding for them is essential, not only for facilities and equipment but also to ensure that their morale is kept at a high level. They turn out to some of the saddest incidents that people have to face. They have to not only apply their skills at that time but also cope with the emotional aftermath that they as service providers face. It is important that their morale be kept as high as possible.

I welcome the disaster funding. It appears that the Federal Government is making it more and more difficult for local councils to access disaster funding. That is very sad. A community that is facing a natural disaster is a community that risks problems in the future, because floods, fires and similar disasters have an intensive and intrusive effect. They affect people for a long time. Access to disaster funding without a great deal of heartburn eases that burden.

I certainly welcome the provision of free ambulance subscriptions for pensioners and Seniors Card holders. I thank the Minister for Emergency Services for her response to a question. When this initiative was first announced, I was asked a lot of questions about whether it would be transferable interstate. The announcement of the initiative referred to "emergency treatment provided by ambulance services". My constituents wondered whether just a very narrow strip of services would be available free and that the rest would have to be paid for, which would necessitate the taking out of cover anyway. The Minister for Emergency Services was very prompt in her response to say that it would cover all ambulance services and that there would be reciprocal rights interstate for pensioners and Seniors Card holders who are holidaying. I thank the Minister for that.

As to the Disability Services portfolio, from the Budget documents I have not been able to obtain a clear understanding of what has been allocated to unmet needs in this financial year.

**Mr Hamill:** \$21.2m extra.

**Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM:** That is \$21.2m extra. I am not sure whether \$30m or \$50m was called for during the very emotive debates in this House.

**Mr Hamill:** About \$100m over three years, if I recall.

**Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM:** That is welcome. The unmet needs sector is one of those that is as big as the bucket will allow it to be. It is very difficult to fully address. It is like the provision of health, education and police services. For those people who are full-time carers of people with disabilities, any assistance is gratefully received. That is certainly appreciated.

I note that \$300,000 is allocated for Gladstone youth. In the Gladstone region, the average age is low. A lot of young families settled in the area when the industries came. They have grown up and they have children of their own now. Many of those are in their teenage years. We have a very high youth population and a very high level of youth unemployment. That funding for prevention and intervention is certainly most appreciated.

In the Transport portfolio, additional funding has been provided for the tilt train. I have a question for the Minister for Transport. We had meetings prior to the election at Mount Larcom. Currently the train stops at Mount Larcom, picks up and sets down passengers. Prior to the election, the then Transport Minister gave an undertaking that the train would continue to stop to pick up passengers when they were booked and to set down passengers. The Labor candidate who ran against me indicated that the Labor Government would continue on with that commitment. I would be certainly very pleased to have that commitment reaffirmed. There are no major capital works projects for transport listed for my electorate. There are two on which I will seek clarification and one that I will remind the Government about.

The issue Monto Road is a hoary chestnut that has been around since Adam was in knee highs. That dirt road services four rural towns. It is a commodity link for timber for the Austicks factory. It also carries cattle and grain. The majority of it is still a dirt road. There is a low-cost seal that is being applied to some sections of that road very effectively. That road is certainly a concern to those residents and will continue to be until that bitumen link is completed. Announcements were made regionally about the Dawson Highway between Calliope and the Biloela range and for the duplication of the Dawson Highway in Gladstone. There is nothing stated about those in the Budget documents, but they were regional announcements. I will be optimistic and assume that they are going ahead.

A number of Budget items remained: the GPA expansions, the vessel tracking system upgrade and the marine pollution response. All of those funding elements are included because of our industrial base. They are essential. I welcome and congratulate the Minister for Mines and Energy on the solar hot water rebate, which was reinstituted. I also congratulate the Minister for The Arts on the RADF funding. Rural communities are very isolated from cultural development. People in Brisbane in the south-east corner are a bit spoilt. I think they do not always appreciate what they have. In rural Queensland, people really fight for access to cultural performances, whether they be the visual arts or the performing arts. People who are developing their skills also struggle to access tutoring and to gain experience in performing. The RADF scheme provides access to funds to smaller groups and individuals who would not qualify for the major grants. A \$2,000 grant to an individual artist or performer is a huge boost to their skills development. Emotionally it encourages them a great deal. The increase in the RADF funding is particularly welcome.

In the Budget Speech the Treasurer talked a lot about increases in apprenticeship numbers. For both sides of politics, this is an essential issue. It is argued about and numbers are bandied about. Members on one side of the Chamber say that it is this many thousand and members on the other say, "No, it isn't really: if you take this off and this off, it is a lesser number." Despite all that political rhetoric, we must remember that usually it is our kids whom we are talking about when we are fighting about numbers or arguing about the reality of the statistics in budgets or anywhere else. Apprenticeships are a key development tool for both our young people and our older people, but particularly for our youth. Any increase in opportunities for apprenticeships is more than welcome.

I look forward to the development of Government housing in the Gladstone region. The statistical breakdown is not in the Budget papers because of the difficulty of doing that. The housing that is available in my electorate is stretched to say the least. I commend the Minister for Public Works and Housing. He sent one of his advisers to my office. We discussed the possibility of aged care accommodation on a block of land in Philip Street. I thank the Minister for his openness to that suggestion and his support for that suggestion. Although it is not in the Budget, I am looking forward to that coming to fruition.

As to law and order, one of the new Budget line items is the replacement of the Rockhampton Correctional Centre. That is not in my electorate, but it is the correctional centre that we access. Some refurbishment money from the previous Government's Budget and some other money from the previous Government's Budget are rolled over and \$11m of a \$60m package for replacement of the Rockhampton Correctional Centre is provided. Unfortunately, jails are a necessary evil. I welcome that new Budget line item for the Rockhampton region and, consequently, the Gladstone region.

Although I am very conscious of the time, I would like to comment on a number of other issues. I congratulate the Government on its continued funding of the Queensland Crime Commission, on the increase in funding to criminal injury compensation and to victims of crime, and on the funding for the surf-lifesaving clubs. I do not want to detail anything more because of the time. I am quite conscious of that. I reiterate my thanks not just to the current Government for the Budget that it has brought down but to the previous Government, because many of its proposals and innovations are included in this Government's Budget. Both Governments should accept the appreciation of people in the community, and certainly the appreciation of the people in my electorate, for the funding that has been made available for people such as carers of people with disabilities and people who face health problems—mental health problems or problems in any other stream of health. Any initiatives that bring greater physical relief or greater emotional relief are more than welcome. We are really doing what Government is about, and that is serving the community. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to be

able to contribute to this appropriation debate. I thank both Governments for contributing to the Budget, and I wish the State of Queensland well in the year to come.

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