



Speech by

**Mr ROB MITCHELL**

**MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS**

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Hansard 18 September 1998

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

**Mr MITCHELL** (Charters Towers—NPA) (2.53 p.m.): When I briefly scanned the Budget papers that were delivered into the House on Tuesday, my first reaction was that the Labor Government had actually dropped the coalition Budget into the House, changing only the nice blue covers with a drawing of the State of Queensland superimposed on the front for these red covers. However, on closer scrutiny over the past day or so, I found that while the Government has used a huge percentage of the coalition's Budget, many key initiatives have been changed, reduced significantly or completely taken from the Budget. I believe that that has been done to prop up election promises and, in most cases, to prop up Labor-held seats across the State.

I am reasonably pleased that the Budget contains the bulk of funding for capital works and infrastructure that was delivered in the coalition's May Budget. However, I am disappointed that funding has been reduced considerably, or has not been included in this year's allocations at all, on some projects that I have worked very hard on. I will talk about a few of those later on.

It is great news that the Government is to retain the Rural Living Infrastructure program for local government areas with a population of up to 15,000 people. This has been a tremendous concept to aid the smaller shires, which are based mainly on rural towns, to fund infrastructure programs that they would not be able to afford from the local rate basis. Over the past few years, most towns in the Charters Towers electorate have been successful in accessing financial assistance from this scheme to build a variety of projects for the towns' betterment and beautification.

Funding to complete the multipurpose health service facility at Clermont is most welcome and the building should be completed by December of this year. It will be of tremendous benefit for the provision of health services for the whole area. The addition of six nursing home rooms incorporated in the hospital will fill a long-needed requirement of the town of Clermont. Previously, the nearest nursing home beds were at Emerald, but aged people from the Central Highlands have usually had to reside in either Mackay or Rockhampton. As I said, this initiative is very welcome.

The Eventide Home at Charters Towers will be upgraded to meet certification standards. I bring to the Minister's attention the concerns of residents and families about the staffing at the Eventide Home. On numerous occasions I have been informed of the lack of care that is available at certain times of the day because of the reduction in the numbers of full-time and qualified nursing staff. Of course, I will write to the Minister regarding those concerns.

I am very disappointed at the reduction in the provision of funding to restructure Mosman Hall in Charters Towers. The coalition was to spend \$7m on the project to update the current building and erect other new infrastructure to house female residents, which has been a wish for many families in north Queensland for a long time. Funding has been reduced from the \$980,000 that was allocated in the coalition's May Budget to only \$100,000 in Labor's Budget. It concerns me that we will see a rerun of the Goss Government's 1993 endeavour to downgrade Mosman Hall, leading to the eventual close of that facility. That would be a devastating blow to all concerned in Charters Towers. Staff, residents and their families will be affected. I would like to think that we will not go back to the bad old days when it was suggested that this hospital be closed.

I also notice from the ministerial portfolio statements of 1998-99 the planned implementation of the second stage of the National Mental Health Plan which, in fact, means the downgrading of psychiatric hospitals across the State. If that is the case, I promise to fight very strongly to keep Mosman Hall open and running with full staff. At this stage, over 60 people are employed at that facility. The closure of it would be very detrimental to the town of Charters Towers.

In rural shires, road funding is always paramount to maintaining the work force of rural towns. I am pleased that most of the funding for the Charters Towers electorate has been maintained for the Road Implementation Program. It is most important that this program is ongoing for the future of all the towns in north-west Queensland. It was pleasing to note the continuation of funding for the important Hughenden to Winton link, the continuation of the widening and overlay of the Flinders Highway and sections of the Gregory Development Road. I also welcome the increase in funding to the Hervey Range development road, to complete the crossings at Keelbottom, Boundary East and West, Spring and Stockyard Creeks. This road is a direct access route to Townsville from the northern and gulf areas not only for carrying cattle to the port but also for the increased tourist traffic travelling that road to Greenvale and the Tablelands. It will really make a big difference up there.

I wish to mention also a couple of sections of road that should receive priority funding. I am disappointed that funding was not allocated for that work in this Budget. I refer to the section of the Gregory Development Road from the completed section just south of the Mount Leysham mine to the Highway mine, which is about 12 kilometres. In view of the increased mining activity at the Pajingo and Highway mines, that work should be undertaken this year. The increased traffic volumes attributable to the Highway mine consists of about 12 Type 2 semitrailers that carry ore along that road every day. That has made the narrow section very dangerous. Buses carrying the miners to the other mines four to six times a day have nearly come to grief. There has also been an increase in the number of tourists towing caravans, and there have been some very narrow escapes. I cannot stress strongly enough the importance of having work done on that section to improve people's safety. It is only a small section. I urge the Minister to look at it.

The Wills Development Road from Julia Creek to the Threeways is another important link that urgently needs funding so as to bring that road up to a decent and safe standard. Contrary to what some people may say, the Wills Development Road is the shortest route to the Century mine development, and it is used to carry equipment and machinery to the site from Townsville. Once again, the increased traffic volumes because of heavy transport and tourism mean that it is dangerous for travellers on those roads.

The Gregory Development Road north of Charters Towers to Greenvale is also in need of urgent funding for widening due to the increased mining activities also in that area. As I said earlier, many other roads need to remain on the program for future funding. I will certainly be bringing those matters to the attention of the Minister for Main Roads over the coming months.

Project funding through the Department of Primary Industries of \$500,000 to construct the new office and laboratory facility at Charters Towers is also a tremendous plus. For many years, DPI staff have worked out of donga-style buildings. It will be a great plus for Charters Towers to have this facility up and running. I wish also to mention the urgent need for further accommodation for teachers at Charters Towers. I note in the Budget papers that \$800,000 has been allocated for the region. I ask the Minister—he has just left the Chamber; I hope he is listening—to consider the needs of Charters Towers. The base rentals up there are well and truly out of the reach of teachers, especially teachers with families. I urge the Minister to look at providing a few more houses for teacher accommodation in Charters Towers. There is also a huge demand for public housing, and houses or units for single public servants and police. We now have increased police numbers thanks to the Townsville academy. We are very short of accommodation for singles. I ask the Minister to look at that.

The scrapping of the reduction in land tax is another slap in the face for small business and industry. It is a shame that this Government did not adopt that promise of our former Government. Most businesses had already factored that reduction into this year's budgets. This Government gave no indication whatsoever to Queensland businesses that this reduction would not be delivered. It is a slap in the face for most businesses, which have set in place their budgets for this year. I urge the Government to consider looking at that issue again, because it is a great concept.

These are very interesting times for the Mines and Energy Department. I note that Minister McGrady had to fly home today because his wife, Sandy, is very ill. I take this opportunity to wish her a full and speedy recovery. It is hard when our families are thousands of kilometres away. I certainly hope that Sandy gets better soon. I do not intend to go into any great detail, as I believe this issue can be covered in the Estimates process and, as I said, the Minister is absent from the House. In their contributions to the Budget debate, a couple of my parliamentary colleagues raised some very grave concerns about the non-allocation of funding for major projects across the State. I will be pursuing those issues with great gusto during the Estimates.

We all know about the huge demand for more generated power in Queensland. It would be stupid of any Government to delay any project if that meant that Queensland and the Queensland people had no security about continuity of power supplies and were threatened with blackouts and load shedding. As far back as 1991, the Labor Government was warned of the impending shortage of power to Queensland and did not act to rectify the problem. We are now seven years down the track and we are seeing a go-slow in respect of the funding arrangements for Callide C and Tarong, and delays being imposed on private enterprise groups entering the market. This is being done just to suit the Government's agenda, and no thought is being given to the urgent need to address future power supplies for the people of Queensland. As the shadow Minister for Mines and Energy, I look forward to further scrutiny of these issues, other portfolio Budget items and the Government's agenda during the Estimates.

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