



Speech by
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1999 STATE BUDGET

Mr BEANLAND (Indooroopilly—LP) (4.12 p.m.): The Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services cannot be trusted, screams the Premier on page 8 of his Budget Speech. There is no confidence in the Minister and the department to spend money effectively, shouts the Premier. The budget of the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care is a betrayal of the hopes and expectations of those who had believed the Minister's rhetoric about world's best practice, about meeting unmet needs and about the implementation of the Forde commission of inquiry recommendations.

Commissioner Forde was quite specific in relation to the amount needed to bring child protection services up to just the national average—not to world's best practice standards. She recommended \$103m. Minister Bligh delivers \$10m. What do we call a Minister with that level of commitment or capability? Minister 10%? Well, not quite 10%, but nearly! As I will point out later, it may be Minister 0%.

And what explanation does the Premier and acting Treasurer now give for this virtual repudiation of the Forde commission of inquiry? He was correctly reported in the Courier-Mail of 14 September as saying that he wanted the money used for services, not "building bureaucracy"—being confirmed on page 8 of the Premier/acting Treasurer's Budget Speech. Is he seriously suggesting that commissioner Forde was recommending that those funds should go towards bureaucratic empire building? We all know that commissioner Forde was not. Services to children were what commissioner Forde was proposing.

However, Premier Beattie was expressing the most damning statement of no confidence in a Minister that could be delivered, short of straight-out sacking of the Minister. The Premier's statement makes it clear that the Minister's department, under her administration, was simply not competent to handle the \$103m recommended by Forde. Yet expenditure in the Premier's Department is up by more than 40% and, in the Deputy Premier's department, by some 70%. There is \$250m for the Lang Park stadium, but only \$10m for children. That is what the public of Queensland are seeing.

Furthermore, I have highlighted this week how Minister Bligh, on 25 August this year, wanting a cheap political headline, misled this Parliament by indicating that the Government had accepted 41 of the 42 recommendations, including this recommendation No. 4 to allocate \$103m when, in fact, only \$10m has been allocated. In other words, this is another recommendation that has not been accepted, contrary to the Minister's statement to Parliament. This Minister's claims about world's best practice are seen for what they are: mere grandstanding, with no ability to deliver on behalf of the children she purports to represent. In any event, Labor has grossly underestimated the disillusionment with its approach to the funding of services in the families, disability and youth services areas. Condemnation has been clear and emphatic across a range of commentators.

Professor Ian O'Connor, chair of the Forde Inquiry Monitoring Committee, has eloquently but very effectively voiced his concerns. In essence, he is "very disappointed." The Courier-Mail of 15 September quoted him as saying—

"The level of services provided to children and families in this State will remain inadequate and the level of pressure on staff in the department and non-government sector will remain ... high."

The Children's Commissioner, Robin Sullivan—one of the Minister's own appointees—was measured and guarded in her choice of words, but her meaning was clear. She is reported as indicating that "the funding was not enough". QCOSS President Shirley Waters' assessment was equally unambiguous. She saw the Beattie Budget as "an ineffective response to a significant problem". Advocates for Survivors of Child Abuse Director Hetty Johnston made the valid comparison with the promised \$250m for the proposed super stadium, while finding a mere \$10m for children's services. Is that Mr Beattie's idea of smart? Is that the Cabinet's idea of a Smart State? We on this side of the House condemn it as a cynical and uncaring exercise. As Ms Johnston has said—

"Kids out there are suffering. We thought the Government understood that."

The Minister has let down a lot of people. There are many who thought that she was their friend and advocate. This is a Budget of shame in relation to her portfolio—whatever is the judgment about other aspects of it.

The picture is no better in relation to disability services. The comments of the spokesperson for the Unmet Needs Campaign reflect almost despair over the level of funding for this much-needed service. After all the rhetoric about a new Department of Disability Services, and especially about more funding for unmet needs, what is the reality? It is pathetic! Firstly, there is the \$14m of funds that were budgeted to be spent in the last financial year but which were unspent in the last financial year—at a time when there is a continuing need for additional services for people with a disability. \$13m of these cutbacks involve grants and subsidies to the community. What a farce!

The Minister's own portfolio statements, on page 14, has three footnotes, each offering an explanation as to why services have not been delivered in line with what was budgeted for. It is hard to believe that any Minister could face this House with three whimpering admissions like those actually printed for the world to see. Why were only 13 families—not 174 as budgeted for—provided with funding last financial year under the so-called Family Support initiative? Well, here is the Minister's answer—

"The number of families receiving funding was far less than expected due to the later than expected date of the new Family Support Initiative."

Can members believe it? Families did not receive the support they needed. More than 160 families did not receive desperately needed support because the Minister's department could not get the scheme going in time. What was the Minister doing about that? More to the point, why did the Minister not keep on top of the issue and ensure that it was proceeding on time? This is another case of cheap rhetoric, but there is no relationship to reality. Where has the concept of ministerial responsibility gone? No doubt someone other than the Minister is to blame. But it is her portfolio and she is responsible for it.

The next note is a doozie! There was an 80% target/estimate for local area coordination pilots to be commenced on time. What percentage do honourable members think this Minister achieved? Maybe 80%? It could have been a hard year and she may have been distracted by other things. Let us say half of the 80% and only expect 40%. Sorry folks, the Minister's score was 0%. That is right—nil! Not one commenced on time! What was the reason? The reason was that "the local area coordination pilots did not commence on time because of a longer than expected consultation period." What an excuse! This comes from the Minister's own statements in her own documents.

One factor that most of us can all manage is the time taken for consultation, but clearly not this Minister. She started in this job with all the bluff and bluster that we have all become accustomed to hearing from her, but when it comes to producing the goods, to running a department, she just has not got what it takes. That excuse is an absolute insult to the Queensland community in general, and in particular to people with a disability.

The third note on page 14 is, if anything, reflective of a person grasping at straws in an effort to explain the inexcusable. All members of the House, irrespective of party affiliation, will know how desperate many families are for respite services in relation to disability clients. The Minister scored 0% again in the number of respite services developed by the agreed date. The estimate had been for 90%. She again failed to score. There must be a reason. It would not be—surely could not be—ministerial incompetence! What does she say in explanation? She says that delays were "due to a number of reasons, particularly delays due to wet weather."

Seriously, that is what is printed in her statement. Did the Minister expect a drought? Was it not reasonable to expect rain in the period concerned? Does she really think that construction work on projects across Queensland was so delayed that none finished on time because it rained this year? Would members not think that the Minister might have fluked one—just one—on time? This document is the most compelling evidence of ministerial incompetence that I have ever seen and is worse than I hope to ever see again.

I will shortly turn to another area of the Minister's portfolio, namely, Families and Community Support. Before that, however, I raise a matter of concern that goes to the credibility of either the Premier or the Minister, or both. In his Budget Speech, the acting Treasurer, Mr Beattie, indicated at page 8 that the miserly \$10m being allocated this year for the implementation of the Forde recommendations would "see 70 new professionally trained child protection workers added to the front line". What is the true situation?

In the Ministerial Portfolio Statements at page 5, the number of relevant staff—full-time equivalents—is shown as rising from 1,013 to 1,035, an increase of 22, not 70, as repeatedly stated by the Premier. Perhaps the Minister can explain this apparent discrepancy in the Budget paper with another one of her now famous footnotes.

As far as Families and Community Support are concerned, the picture is just as bleak. The Government's priorities relevant to this program are listed at page 3 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements as: better quality of life; safer and more supportive communities; more jobs for Queenslanders; and building Queensland's regions. This is spelled out at page 16 as an output that "seeks to improve the quality of life for families and individuals through community development and the provision of community services for homeless persons, older people and people affected by domestic violence".

I refer in particular to the Minister's responsibility for homeless persons and to that aspect of her responsibility to improve the quality of life for those clients of her department. What practical steps is the Minister taking, or even planning to take, to improve the quality of life for that group of homeless young people whose plight was highlighted in recent media coverage of conditions at a residential in Kangaroo Point? The media article quoted "government officials" as saying that they were powerless to act in a situation where homeless youths were in a house "littered with syringes and garbage".

Community expectations seem to be of a higher order than the services the Minister is providing for those people. If the Minister's officials, or those of other caring agencies, are powerless to intervene to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those young people, then surely it is the responsibility of this Government to empower them. That is what this Parliament is for, and the Minister is not likely to encounter much difficulty in enacting legislation in this House to ensure the safety and proper care of such young people.

Some of us actually care about them and want to see them receive the help that they so desperately need. The question is what has to happen before the Minister actually moves. We all know about the Premier's concern that the Minister may do nothing more than preside over an empire-building bureaucracy. What about proving him wrong in one or two matters and actually getting effective legislation and worthwhile services in place?

How true it is that children and young people are suffering and the Minister seems to be doing virtually nothing. The Minister should tell us if she is doing something of practical value for these young people. It is not very evident from where I sit or from where the media commentator viewed that appalling situation.

The next point I looked for in the Ministerial Portfolio Statements was services or funding relevant to the illicit use of drugs and related issues. Some weeks ago, I asked on notice for certain information relating to the 1998-99 Budget for this purpose. Whether the Minister likes it or not, and whether or not she chooses to believe it or tries to ignore it, the misuse of drugs is a major issue for many young people for whom she has ministerial responsibility.

In answer to my four-part question I received three answers that defy comparison for arrogance on the Minister's part. The answer given to three of those four questions was, "The information sought is contained in the 1998-99 Budget papers." It is now clear why such an answer was given to the questions about the amounts budgeted within her portfolio to address illicit drug use and related activities. I might say that a similar answer came from the Minister for Health. No amount was budgeted—not a brass razoo! The Minister had not budgeted a cent for this purpose and, being too ashamed to admit to this degree of negligence, tried to cover her tracks by brushing off the question with an answer of breathtaking arrogance. It was not an answer at all.

The attitude of this Minister is an insult to the Parliament and to the institution of parliamentary questions. In the meantime, Queensland's young people are injecting and dying in hovels in our cities and remote communities and Minister 0% does not even include a single dollar to deal with their problem in her budget. Only Labor would have the audacity to call this a smart Budget!

I come now to the Minister's capital works program. This is another matter where gross ineptitude just oozes out of the Budget papers. Back in July, I asked the Minister about the year-to-date expenditure on these items—only to get a response similar to that just mentioned, namely that—

"The information sought will be detailed in the forthcoming 1999-2000 State Budget."

I thank the Minister. I thank her for nothing. Her disrespect for parliamentary practice is bad enough. Her failure to extend even elementary courtesy says more about her as a person, and to that extent she is to be pitied.

I come now to the figures that have been produced in the Budget papers. Now I see why the Minister was not keen to speak about her lack of progress last financial year. It certainly does not engender confidence with regard to what she is likely to achieve this year. The Beattie Budget is supposed to be about jobs. Did the Premier's office not advise this Minister of this supposed emphasis? Does this Minister not remember that, as a member of the Beattie Labor Cabinet, she is supposed to wake up each morning and think "jobs, jobs, jobs"?

May I suggest to the Minister that she simply wakes up and gets on with spending the funds appropriated for capital acquisitions by her department? If Mr Beattie is relying on this Minister to do something constructive about jobs, I can understand his reluctance to entrust this Minister with the rest of the \$103 million for child protection mentioned earlier.

I refer to page 29 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements. The state of Queensland's youth detention centres has been widely publicised. The Minister's predecessor in the Goss administration actually disposed of the State's best and major facility during her disastrous years as Minister. It looked as though Labor was going to make amends for the folly of those earlier years when some \$30m was included in the 1998-99 Budget for a rebuilding program for youth detention centres. No doubt, if the responsibility for these had been left with the then Queensland Corrective Services Commission the money would have been spent and the facilities would now be available for the young people in custody. What has this Minister achieved? Let me tell members that it is better than 0%, but only just. The Minister spent \$1.3m of the \$30m up until 30 June and asks us to believe that \$24.6m will be used this year. There was no footnote about fairies at the bottom of the garden but there was a footnote indicating that—

"Cabinet approved the Youth Detention Centre Infrastructure Plan in 1999. Construction of the new Youth Detention Centre will commence in 1999-2000."

What is that supposed to tell us? Is it a "Don't blame me; Cabinet made me not do it" or is it an admission of this Minister's own inability to get the planning process through Cabinet in time to get the construction phase under way? I say to Minister Bligh that that is very sloppy, negligent and ineffective administration. It is another major project that has not started on time. Whichever way one looks at this project, it screams incompetence. How long is the Minister going to get away with this mockery and misuse of ministerial responsibility? More to the point, is it little wonder that the Premier no longer has confidence in the Minister and her department?

It is a similar story regarding the Loganlea Residential Centre. No valid reason has been given for spending only \$963,000 of the \$1.7m that was budgeted for it for the year, just a footnote dismissing that further oversight with the words, "Delays to the construction of Loganlea Residential Centre", and that it is to be completed in this financial year. The note regarding the item on multipurpose centres is about as helpful as the other two notes that I have mentioned previously. It sets out to explain why only \$462,000 out of a budget of \$1.597m was actually spent. Again, it is a lame and totally inadequate explanation.

The whole capital acquisition statement is just more of the same. It paints a dismal picture of a Minister whose performances are dismal in any aspect of her portfolio that is examined to gauge her real as opposed to claimed performance. The Minister and her budget are a manifestation of a failure to live up to the claims and expectations that have been engendered by clever rhetoric. Those fancy claims have now been seen to be hollow. The Budget documents expose a sham that has been perpetrated on the people of Queensland, among whom are the most vulnerable members of our society. It is little wonder that the Premier and acting Treasurer says that the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services and her department cannot be trusted.

In addition, this Budget does nothing to address the issues raised in the Productivity Commission's July report into the effects of gambling on Queenslanders. Again, the Beattie Labor Government has been strongly criticised by Relationships Australia, which is at the forefront in helping Queenslanders who have gambling problems. This Budget, by introducing the Beattie stealth tax, introduces a new tax that will hit the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care severely in the future. The charge means that, while this Beattie Labor Government rips the heart out of this department, there will be less money for services and less money for those in need.

In addition, Standard and Poor's, that well-known international ratings agency, has confirmed the point made by the National/Liberal coalition that this Budget is in the red, that it is in deficit to the amount of \$1,200m—the first time in over 20 years that it has been in deficit. So in just 15 months, we now have a Queensland John Cain. Yes, Labor is on the way to doing to Queensland what Labor did to Victoria. It is little wonder that the community is so angry with this Budget.

In the few moments remaining to me, I want to make some brief comments about the redevelopment of the Ballymore sporting oval. Initially, some \$12m was budgeted for Ballymore. However, in the past financial year, only \$658,000 was spent. This year, some \$3.6m is budgeted for Ballymore. Although the total estimated cost for the redevelopment of Ballymore has been reduced from \$12m to \$6.9m, quite clearly this year the funding for Ballymore has suffered substantial cuts. A major redevelopment is now going to take place at Lang Park. The \$3.6m to be spent this year on Ballymore leaves a carryover of \$2.7m. Clearly, that indicates that, when it comes to funding, Ballymore is getting the chop and Lang Park—

Time expired.
