



Speech by

**Mrs D. PRATT**

**MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH**

---

Hansard 17 September 1999

### 1999 STATE BUDGET

**Mrs PRATT** (Barambah—IND) (4.05 p.m.): In common with other honourable members, I was both eager and concerned to get my hands on a copy of this 1999-2000 Budget. Having heard Mr Beattie confirm in this House on several occasions that he knew just how severe the unemployment situation was in our area, I quickly flicked through the Capital Statement and found only three references to the Barambah electorate. I must confess that I expected a little more for an area which the Premier knows has some of the worst unemployment levels in the State and the second highest poverty level in Australia. That area is certainly waiting for proof of this Government's sincerity.

The 6% capital charge was a major concern to me, as it appears to penalise asset acquisition and/or retention by the Government. This brings into question the Minister for Health's assertions that the document being circulated, which relates to the closure of the Nanango Hospital or the rationalisation of other hospitals in the Burnett, has no substance. Is it a true representation of this Government's intentions? This tax on assets will cause rationalisation in hospitals, one-man ambulance stations and one-man police stations, schools and so on.

Already the volunteer first responders are taking over in areas where once ambulance officers from other areas were rostered to stay overnight in smaller stations, as in the case of Proston. Last night I received a report from my office concerning a man who hurt his back at work. It was reported to me that no doctor in Nanango could fit him in for between two and four weeks, as their workload was so immense and they were all booked up. It was also reported to me that the Kingaroy Hospital had advised that it was best that he was not taken there, as it was also fully booked. The Nanango Hospital has a doctor on duty only between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. In desperation, the man's boss rang to confirm the man's story and to ask on his behalf for him to be seen, as it is essential that a person who has suffered a work-related injury be seen by a doctor. The Cherbourg Hospital has a doctor on duty full-time, and it looks as though this man may have to travel past three hospitals on a trip which at normal speeds would take over an hour. As yet, I have not been able to confirm whether this man has actually seen a doctor 24 hours later. But still there was nothing much in this Budget for the electorate of Barambah, except a veiled threat of a 6% capital charge.

I turn to schools, particularly the Kilcoy and Benarkin schools. Nowhere in this Budget did I find funding marked for any of the schools in the Barambah electorate, although I am aware of submissions from several schools. The Kilcoy State High School has been waiting for and has requested work on the school's home economics kitchen and the area used for chemical storage. It still has a toilet block which is used as a band room. All of these issues raise serious safety concerns that need addressing.

This is the second Budget for this Government, and still the children who are sick at the Kilcoy State School have to lie in a small room which is used as a thoroughfare. The Kilcoy State School is still waiting for a library which it believed had been promised by the previous Government. On hearing of this new library they were to be given, they decided to make something very special to hang in it. They painstakingly stitched a beautiful wall hanging, which they showed me at last year's awards day. They have a wall-hanging but no library to hang it in.

The Benarkin State School has requested extra room for its expanding needs. It was not asking too much. It wanted a demountable or perhaps an old school building from one of the other schools in the area that have closed. Again, what concerns me is the effect that this 6% capital charge will have

on these small one-teacher schools. Will this Government rationalise closing these schools because it is much cheaper to subsidise the students to attend a bigger school than it is to keep the smaller school operating?

Tarong Energy has received an amount of money that is little more than enough to pay its maintenance bill. Mr McGrady stood in front of 150 people in Kingaroy and said that he would be pushing for the Tarong extension. He also said that four projects were on the books but that only three would go ahead. As there were three private projects and one public utility, it did not take an Einstein to see which project did not quite fit. Tarong has been waiting since June for approval of this project. Information I have received states that Tarong is making penalty payments to contractors of \$88,000 per day and that Tarong will be forced to pay \$4m for non-performance of the contract. I did not hear the Minister say that those statements by the member for Hinchinbrook were not true.

Another frightening situation that exists for Tarong—and I would like the Minister to refute this—is in relation to the viability of transporting gas. To ensure the viability of the Chevron gas project, we need only to turn to the report by Hetherington and Co. dated 2 December 1994 which states that, for the transport of gas to be viable, it is essential that there be large volumes transported and, to transport large volumes, one must have a large market. So the question begs to be asked: if this Government wants to ensure the viability of the Chevron gas project, does it not follow that it is not really interested in a publicly owned coal fired power station?

Very promising research is, as we speak, being carried out in Queensland on the gasification of coal underground. I do not profess to know all about it, but there are many who do. With our known gas reserves, I have to again ask the question: why is it necessary to purchase offshore gas from a geologically and politically unstable part of the world? Have we already forgotten the forced withdrawal from Ok Tedi in Bougainville?

We are told that this is to be a smart Budget to carry us into the new millennium so that Queensland becomes the Smart State. I respectfully suggest that this Government be careful that it does not get too smart for its own good. It takes a wide variety of ingredients to make a Smart State, and to miss even one link in the chain can be very devastating and have considerable consequences for the future. In Martin and Scewman's *Global Attack*, written in 1995, they speak of 20% of the population working and the other 80% experiencing "tititainment". There is a gradual decline. No matter what spin is put on it, there is a decline in the number of people employed. This a frightening scenario.

This Budget places great emphasis on education, welfare and information technology, none of which generate a lot of wealth. It is necessary to stimulate the private sector because, as it is often said, the private sector is the engine room of job creation. Nowhere in this Budget can I find reference to the private sector.

It appears that \$27m has been deducted from the DPI budget. As I represent a primary industry area, this is of grave concern to me. I remember very clearly the scrapping of the proposed Kingaroy DPI conference centre that we lost, although I must say that this Government is not to blame. Unfortunately, it was a blow, as is any cut in funding to the rural sector. The rural sector is continuing to be neglected and this Government needs to address the concerns of rural Queensland on both a State and Federal level. As I stated earlier, I am commenting only on the capital statement. The shadow Ministers are more equipped to comment on the individual portfolios. So let us look at the capital statement. What did we get? In Public Works—

**Mr Fouras:** Do you agree with the shadow Ministers?

**Mrs PRATT:** No, but they know more than I do at this point on their portfolios, so I am happy to defer to them.

**Mr Fouras:** So you think that they're right?

**Mrs PRATT:** I listened.

In relation to Public Works, the Kingaroy Court House got some renovations, and I thank the Minister for that. Under Transport, we got nil; Primary Industries, nil; Police and Corrective Services, nil; Natural Resources, nil. I cannot repeat often enough the need for water infrastructure in the rural sector. The decision on the Nathan dam seems to be one that this Minister is either unwilling or unable to make. As I have said before, please tell people who live and work and wait because of this indecisiveness one way or the other—yes or no—if this project is to go ahead.

In relation to Mines and Energy, Tarong information states that it will cover maintenance only. In relation to Main Roads, we got nil. Under Housing, the Wide Bay/Burnett area is mentioned, but as it is such a large area, I am loath to claim anything at this time. In relation to Health, the Weinholt Nursing Home got a mention—\$10,000—and I thank the Minister for that. In relation to Families, Youth and Community Care, we got nil; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, nil; Emergency Services, nil, although we have received much over the past year; and Education, nil. To save the acting Treasurer some time, I seek leave to table this map.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Mickel): I am sorry? I could not hear you.

**Mrs PRATT:** You were not listening, were you, Mr Deputy Speaker?

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I heard absolutely everything.

**Mrs PRATT:** You were not. I asked leave to table this map.

Leave granted.

**Mrs PRATT:** This is a map that I would ask the acting Treasurer to study so that he can understand exactly where the Barambah electorate and the South Burnett is in relation to Maryborough and other towns in the Wide Bay/Burnett region. My only hope in this Budget is that the acting Treasurer is, as I have stated before, unaware of the areas within the Wide Bay/Burnett area and that allocation of capital funding for the Barambah electorate is hidden in that area which he has called "other".

---