



Speech by

PAUL LUCAS MLA

MEMBER FOR LYTTON

Hansard 17 September 1999

1999 STATE BUDGET

Mr LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (3.53 p.m.): I am proud to speak in support of this excellent Beattie Budget and as part of the Beattie Labor Government. Since taking office, the Beattie Government has acted in a number of very important ways. However, as a Labor representative in this Parliament, the one matter that is dearest to my heart is the way in which the Government has approached unemployment. The unemployment rate is now at 8.31%, which is a decrease from the 9% unemployment rate that we inherited from the coalition. This year's Budget predicts a further reduction in the unemployment rate to 7.75%. Peter Beattie was scorned and laughed at when he made the target of reducing the unemployment rate to 5%. However, the people of Queensland said that it was what they wanted and this Government has gone about delivering that target.

At the same time as delivering a Budget that provides many services and new initiatives, the Beattie Labor Government has still managed to retain Queensland's reputation as having the lowest per capita State taxes in Australia. For 1999-2000, per capita collections of State taxes is estimated at \$1,599 per head. The average tax burden of the other States is some 26.1% higher than that levied in Queensland, with New South Wales being the highest at \$2,252 and Victoria at approximately \$1,887. In other words, New South Wales levies per head some \$600 more.

However, the tax system benefits both business—we have the highest payroll tax exemption threshold and the lowest basic tax rate of all the States—and private individuals through stamp duty accounting for less than 1% of the median house price for the principal place of residence compared to the rate in most of the other States where it is around 3%, not to mention Queensland having no fuel tax. The Government will make a \$5.2 billion investment in capital works—a record—and matters such as the \$20m investment in biotechnology research is how Queensland will achieve its 5% unemployment target and become the Smart State.

In relation to biotechnology, there is an initial allocation in the Budget of \$3.75m to be invested in the Institute of Molecular Bioscience at the University of Queensland, with a massive allocation of \$77.5m over 10 years for the largest biological research facility in Australia. In modern society, whether it is information technology, molecular bioscience or biotechnology, it is all about getting in there quick and getting in there first. The people who are first receive a premium on their capital. This Government will make this State the Smart State. The Budget contains other initiatives, such as \$8m over four years for the Centre for Biomolecular Science and Drug Discovery at the Gold Coast campus of Griffith University and \$5m—as part of a further \$20m—for cancer research.

The IT industry is Queensland's fastest-growing industry. The Government has allocated \$2.6m for IT training and \$38.3m for capital expenditure on IT and T in TAFE colleges. That is allocating money to where the training takes place. Education is the key to bettering oneself individually and bettering society. That is why it is so important that this Government spends money in that regard. It creates not only a temporary situation but also it creates in the long term in our society the ability to take advantage of future economic prosperity.

The Budget allocates for an increase of 288 throughout the State and \$40m over four years for the Networked Learning Community to ensure that there is one computer for every five children in schools—a great initiative. In terms of legal aid funding, the Budget allocates \$2.5m for legal aid. A significant proportion of that funding will go to community legal centres. I am proud to be a founding

member of the Bayside Community Legal Service. When that service was first established, it did not receive funding. It received funding only under Attorney-General Matt Foley and this Labor Government, which allows it to provide services and advice to people in my electorate who could not otherwise afford to get legal representation or qualify for legal aid.

I am very pleased to see the Beattie Government's phased-in commitment to implementing the important recommendations of the Forde commission of inquiry in committing \$100m over four years. Under this Government, the child protection system will no longer be a broken system starved of resources. In terms of police, approximately 325 new officers and 65 civilians will be appointed.

However, this Budget is not just about dollars and cents; this Beattie Government's commitment is to a better quality of life for all Queenslanders and restores a society in Queensland's economy. The Budget increase in the Home and Community Care program by another \$4.4m will take 6,000 frail aged and their carers off the waiting list for the State's community-based health services. The long-awaited \$35m to address the unmet needs of the disabled will assist people with a disability to enjoy the same rights as those enjoyed by other Queenslanders.

The Budget provides further capital funding of \$20m to redevelop the Mater Children's Hospital for a 20-bed child and youth acute in-patient facility will be a very important first stage. As a parent and as there are children in my electorate who could potentially use that facility at the Mater Children's Hospital, I say that that is very, very important funding that will go towards the future health and safety of our young people.

I note that the Minister for Emergency Services is present in the Chamber. She is an outstanding Minister for Emergency Services. In this Budget, she has certainly delivered to my electorate as well as to the other areas in the State. An amount of \$7.3m has been allocated for Stage 2 of the hot fire training facility at Whyte Island. That will train firefighters from all over Queensland in firefighting techniques and safe backdraft and flashover training. This is all about being the Smart State. This facility was not just built anywhere; it is built at the port of Brisbane. It shares facilities with the Caltex oil refinery—a facility which might need the services of firefighters at the highest level possible. That is a very important initiative.

There is \$100,000 for a fire investigation burn house, which is also at the same site, to assist firefighters to train under simulated fire conditions and development investigation skills in determining fire causation. That is not to mention the further \$450,000 that this Minister has allocated for land for a new fire station at Wynnum, with the site currently being identified. I will be very keen to get hold of the old heritage listed fire station when it becomes available.

In Health, \$2.9m is being spent on the Redland Hospital, which provides a number of services that people in my electorate of Lytton and the Wynnum/Manly area use. Its facilities include birthing services and a 24-bed mental health unit. Wynnum Adult Mental Health performs an excellent service. There is an all-in-one Bayside District Health Service with in-patient mental health facilities. That is very important. In my electorate, Casuarina Lodge will be expanded. That service caters for young adults with acquired brain injury, most of whom are in tragic circumstances. It will be expanded from 21 to 40 units.

My electorate has a greater than average proportion of older people. There are many instances, for example, of an elderly woman whose husband is in nursing care accommodation or, in some cases, psychogeriatric care. Sometimes those services are located some distance from the patient's family home and spouse. I am delighted to see the commitment to the Moreton Bay Nursing Care Unit, with 22 beds being transferred from Wolston Park. Those two facilities, the Casuarina Lodge and the Moreton Bay Nursing Care/Psychogeriatric Unit, will receive some \$4.12m. Also, a number of retirement villages are in my electorate. It is great to see the Minister's allocation of \$750,000 over four years for the establishment of a tribunal for retirement village residents. My electorate has a median age of 37 years, as compared with the Queensland median of 33 years.

Before I conclude my contribution today, I wish to speak about the notion of Queensland being the Smart State and in particular how that affects my electorate of Lytton. Queensland has a strong export-based economy. However, the Asian crisis resulted in recessions in several key trading partners during 1998—Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia and New Zealand. This is a very serious trend for Queensland as the share of Queensland exports to east Asian countries, excluding Japan, has increased from 16% in 1998-99 to over 31% in 1996-97. This problem has been offset to some extent by the strong performance of the US economy and solid growth in Europe. Economic growth in Queensland's major trading partners is expected to continue to recover during the remainder of 1999, with growth of 2.5% expected and growth forecast to rise in 2000 to 2.7%.

One of the other things underpinning our strength is the thriving domestic sector. Gross State expenditure, a measure of domestic activity, is estimated to have grown by 6.75% over the last year. Some honourable members believe that exports are a result of what happens to the farms or mines alone. But that could not be further from the truth. Regional development and the development in

major manufacturing and exporting centres also matters. It is not the class warfare of the National Party—the bush against the city. The fact is that the bush and the city are partners. What is grown in the bush and what is mined in rural areas is exported through urban ports. The port of Brisbane is important in that regard. I am glad to see the expenditure and initiatives as part of the Smart State program. There is strong support for vocational education and training. Some 31.18% of the work force in my electorate is in the skilled vocational category, which is some 2.3% greater than the State average. That is statistically significant and important for the development of the port.

I am also very pleased to see that the Port of Brisbane Corporation is expending \$91m as a result of this Budget. That includes such things as \$12m for car terminals. A fleet fitter has come up from Melbourne and recently established a car import/preparation business. There will be further relocation to Fisherman's Island of car import terminals over time.

There has been a 13% increase in container growth through the port, a 16% increase in cotton exports and an \$11.3m increase in meat exports. The Budget has allocated some \$11m for export processing plants, which is all about value adding. Some \$27.9m has been budgeted for wharves and terminals. After it is grown out in the bush, we will export it through our port and make money for both the bush and the city—all Queenslanders. The port of Brisbane is about building strategic alliances with business. Earlier this year, Transport Minister Steve Bredhauer and the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Jim Elder, opened the island packing and cotton storage facility at the port. Rather than having containers shipped out to the bush to be packed, they are now packed and stored at the port.

In conclusion, I welcome this Budget as a great Budget for Queensland and the electorate of Lytton and the Wynnum/Manly/Lota area. I hope to see the Port Road developed in the very near future. I know the Minister has been working extremely hard on that. It will add even further to our economic development. We are proud to play a part in Queensland's economic development and we thank the State Government as a partner.
