



Speech by

BILL FELDMAN

MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE

Hansard 20 July 2000

BUDGET 2000

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—CCAQ) (12.07 a.m.): It is with pleasure that I rise to take part in the debate on the Appropriation Bills. The Budget 2000-01, the millennium Budget, has turned out to look a bit like a bottle of doctor's brew: it smells a little bit, has not got a fancy taste but looks good on the outside. We actually have Premier Beattie, the smiling, broad-grinned snake oil salesman, doing the sales pitch as per the instructions of a media spin doctor from Gentleman Inala Jim's office. She must have a better arm than Shane Warne to get that much turn on the spin.

Everyone has been asking the serial funds rapist in the Treasury portfolio where the extra money was coming from, and it was not long before the violated Auctioneers and Agents Fidelity Fund, the port authorities, the Public Service superannuation fund and the energy GOCs came out of their Rohypnol-induced blackouts to find money missing from the kitty. But the books balance, as long as Fair Trading does not check the scales, and the books are in the black or so they tell us. But is this referring to the ink on the page or the lack of lighting due to the failing maintenance program in the power industry, presided over by the Minister for Energy?

Like everyone here, I am actually hoping that the Budget is in the black and that the taxpayers of Queensland are not being sold a pup. However, like most, I began looking at the past performance indicators and then looking at the forward projections. The past performance of providing a jobs, jobs, jobs working environment did not bode too well.

Looking forward, I see words in the Economic and Revenue Outlook, Budget Paper No. 3, under "Key Economic Assumptions", indicating that economic growth in Queensland will ease to three and a quarter per cent and that inflation experienced in Queensland's major trading partners is expected to increase over the forecast period to 1.5%. Even though the gross State product is forecast to grow by 3.75%, it is down on the 4.25% of the previous year. The reasons were set out on pages 14 and 15 of Budget Paper No. 3: household consumption to ease to 4%; private investment to fall by 4%; dwelling investment to fall by 4.5%; business investment to fall by 5.75%; investment in buildings and structures to ease by three-quarters of a percent; investment in machinery and equipment to fall by 8.25%; and public final demand to ease by 1.5%—a combined effect of a subdued outlook for Commonwealth expenditures as well as the peaking of major capital works projects in Health and on the Pacific Motorway.

As can be seen, this Budget is a tragic indictment of what has been described as a can't do Government which, by the presentation of this document, admits its lack of business acumen and surrenders to the inevitability of Queensland relinquishing its status as Australia's strongest State economy.

One of the major surrenders in this Budget is an admission that Queensland's unemployment level has defied the national average, remaining at around 8% in an environment in which the general trend is significantly downwards. Combined with this damning statistic is the indication of shrinking growth, which gives no comfort to those battling Queenslanders who are suffering the demoralising experience of being unemployed. Unemployment is the most significant factor leading to the decay of our society and our way of life. Unemployment leads to depression and a lack of self-esteem, which are in turn catalysts for substance abuse, violence, family breakdown and lawlessness.

Queensland is arguably the richest State in Australia in terms of natural resources, so the disparity between our unemployment levels and those of the other States can be attributed only to bad management. This Government should have been encouraging an environment conducive to increased production and an environment encouraging small business to take the risks and make the investments that provide the jobs. Small business and primary industries are the wealth generators of our economy and should be nurtured and encouraged by Government policies and strategies. Sadly, the reverse has been the case as this Government has waded through industry like the grim reaper, destroying everything in its path, wiping out jobs by the hundred with every stroke of its legislative pen. We have seen job carnage in the timber industry and the dairy industry due directly to Government actions. We have seen thousands of other jobs lost due to Government inertia or unwillingness to take positive action against economic rationalism and the economic rationalists.

Why, just the other night in this Chamber we debated the diesel fuel rebate. "A dirty diesel deal done dirt cheap by the Democrats", I believe was the crusty cry from the member for Woodridge. But this Government added the final kick in the guts to those businesses, and I am talking of the extractive industries and the contractors done to death by the withdrawal of the 8.3c rebate from the State Government. This has added some 10c a litre to the off-road diesel usage of these industries. I just wonder how many cranes we will see over the skyscrapers of Brisbane in the coming years.

These building contractors entered their contracts months—and sometimes six to eight months—ago, when the diesel price was lower and the rebate was in place. Now they have lost their rebate and the diesel price is up, and in some cases these contractors are hundreds of thousands of dollars out in their contracted price. They have to wear that, and with the stroke of a pen this Government and the Federal Government have done them in. No wonder they are turning to us in the City Country Alliance!

The worst part is that there are three major extractive industries and private environmental landscape engineering contractors in my electorate, and they are hurting because of this pen stroke. As a matter of fact, I have here a letter from Park Forge, environmental landscape and engineering contractors. The final couple of paragraphs in this document state—

"It gets worse! In Queensland we now have this incredible situation where the off-road diesel fuel subsidy ended on the 30th June 2000 and an on-road subsidy of approximately 8 cents a litre by the Queensland Government applies.

This means that off-road diesel for construction is now 8 cents per litre plus the aforementioned 1.7 cents per litre above the on-road price. This is a major impost which many businesses may not be able to bear. Locked into long term fixed price contracts, some contractors are being asked to pay an extra \$15-20,000 per month—effective overnight 30th June/1st July.

The civil construction industry urges the Government to urgently address these issues:

Immediately resolving the Queensland crisis;

Immediately restoring the equivalent of the previous state based off-road subsidy of 8.354 cents per litre;

Adjusting the diesel fuel excise to put the 1.7 cents per litre back where it should be—with all off-road diesel users;

Longer term examining how the construction industry can access the Diesel Fuel Rebate Scheme.

The industry awaits the Government's response."

The Premier's plaintive cries of "jobs, jobs, jobs" and his boast about 5% will go down in history, alongside such other famous remarks and quotes as that of his Labor mate Bob Hawke's "no child will be living in poverty" and Keating's "I-a-w, law" disappearing tax cuts. This Budget is a smoke-and-mirrors trick by an inept snake-oil salesman Treasurer that does absolutely nothing for battling Queenslanders.

If this Government applied itself as diligently to economic management as it has done to prostitution, same-sex marriages, the lunatic Left of the environmentalists and political correctness, we would be savouring the benefits of a vibrant economy. Unfortunately, those sectors are not productive and are not wealth-creating, except perhaps in the case of prostitution, where the wealth generation benefits the pimps and the drug pushers. This Government has demonstrated that it is soft on prostitution, soft on unnatural liaisons and soft on radical minority groups but could not care less about the workers, the battlers, the farmers and the small-business owners. This incompetent Treasurer has demonstrated by his own behaviour in the net bet fiasco that he is more interested in the "quick quid" approach than in developing a strong, productive and sustainable economy.

However, there is a little bit of a silver lining for the electorate of Caboolture, and it is really looking for a little bit of silver in the clouds that are gathering. It would be remiss of me not to mention them. I see that the Redcliffe/Caboolture District Mental Health Unit is the recipient of a rehabilitation and dual diagnosis unit worth \$1.6m. The value of the mental health unit at the Caboolture Hospital is remarkable, and further injection of funds into the area of mental health is essential. As I said during the debate on the Mental Health Bill, I was hoping that a lot of those measures would alleviate some of the pressures on police, and I really hope that they do.

However, there are other problems that I have highlighted to the Minister before with respect to the area of district health. These are the ongoing problems at the Caboolture Dental Clinic, where more staff, especially dentists, are required to reduce the daily backlog of patients and the 33-month waiting list of 1,600-odd people. These are hardworking and retired Caboolture and Bribie Island residents—the pensioners, the lower-income earners and the welfare recipients; the real battlers of my electorate—and this Labor Government is totally ignoring them. These are the salt-of-the-earth people who used to vote Labor because they felt that they would be looked after. However, that did not turn out to be the case with David Gordon, an old Labor man who waited through three successive Governments—two Labor and one coalition—and the only one who came to his help to push the mantle for his hip operation, first scheduled in 1994, was me. CCAQ was successful on its first try, and again I say: you wonder why previous Labor voters—real, thinking people—are turning to the City Country Alliance. No issue is too small or too insignificant for us to deal with, because we deal with real people.

I note that the Police Minister is in the Chamber. Policing is a real issue in Caboolture, and I am still waiting to see the full contingency of those 10 extra police at Caboolture and the 1.5 that were promised to Bribie Island. I am pleased that the watch-house there has finally been upgraded, but the Minister really needs to increase the staffing level in order that the Bribie Island station can be manned for at least 24 hours from Thursdays through to Sundays. They have a real juvenile and hoon problem over there, and the problem is escalating. Residents are getting entirely sick of the lack of staff and more important priorities being an excuse for the inability to attend to some of the hoon complaints over there.

Elimbah, Beerburrum, Toorbul and Donnybrook residents are hoping that the erection of the new electricity substation at Morayfield might alleviate some of the problems in power outages, brownouts and blackouts that have become the norm for these embattled residents, who expect more from this Government, just as Toorbul residents expect more from the Environment Minister with respect to the escalating kangaroo population in town, which I spoke of this morning. The town prides itself on the tourism factor of the roos, but not the quantity that is now there because of an inordinately good wet season last year. Mr Welford would be well advised that this is no laughing—or, in that case, swearing—matter, and it needs urgent rectification.

TV channels 7, 9, 10 and 2 must have an unbelievable fear of highlighting what I say in any form, because they did not even mention me on those channels. It really shows what sort of fear they have of City Country Alliance Queensland when we highlight those little issues that affect hardworking battlers in our electorates. I wonder if it is the interviewers or the executives who are frightened of the City Country Alliance. Thank goodness for good old SBS. At least one can expect a decent run there. There is a continued fear of CCAQ because we are certainly on the rise, and I look forward to ignoring those very same TV stations which choose to ignore us.

A little more funding—\$5m for the electric trains in Caboolture, with the signalling upgrade from Caboolture to Landsborough and signalling rectification between Caboolture and Petrie. We are now seeing the northern bypass come towards the inevitable turning of the first sod. The Minister made a promise at a Community Cabinet meeting way back in February last year that he would have the Moodlu bridge on the D'Aguilar Highway removed and rectified by year's end. This is a \$48m project and it has had its second allocation of some \$5.7m this year. I look forward to seeing this project well under way, as do most of the residents of King Street, to relieve the stress from the main streets of Caboolture and get the traffic out of the CBD. The Caboolture Historical Society and the Caboolture Show Society are certainly pleased that the screaming and yelling that was done in relation to having that road lifted over the top of the showground there came to fruition and they are not losing half of the showground. Jack Lindsay will be very pleased with that.

As the residents of Ningi and Bribie Island can attest to only too well, the ongoing planning and construction is under way on the Bribie road. Planning has commenced and community consultation is gaining momentum as to whether Ningi will be bypassed or not. The message that should be coming back loud and clear to the Minister is that the town actually wants to be bypassed. The Pebble Beach residents also expect and need desperately a roundabout at the intersection of Bribie Island Road and Bestman Road East to avoid another inevitable fatal accident. This has been highlighted to the Minister already this week.

After a lot of hard work from P & Cs and a lot of yelling and screaming at the Minister for Education, the schools in my electorate fared reasonably well in this Budget. Bev Sweeper, the previous president of the Caboolture State School P & C, will be pleased to see the Caboolture State School amenities and covered play area. That was well and truly needed. It has been on the priority list for some nine years. Now \$292,000 is the reality and, Bev, guess what, no more stinking urinals at the school.

The Elimbah State School and preschool development classroom accommodation, amenities block and a two-storey general learning area block, some \$1.2m worth of work, was sorely needed in this growing community. They are finally catered for. The squeaking wheel is still getting a little bit of oil there.

The Wamuran State School is receiving the final allocation of its redevelopment, some \$500,000, and with its new look buildings and structures it may finally now be able to shake that name of being the demountable school. This is now a school more conducive to good education and learning, thanks to the tenacity of a strong P & C that left no stone unturned in its quest for a hearing, despite the threats from the Department of Education. I was glad to be of assistance to them.

The Tullawong State High School, one of our newest schools, is still receiving some recurrent funding to the tune of \$333,000 for a staff and amenities block. It is thankful for the continued interest in its expanding student numbers.

However, the Minister for Education does not get off easily, even though he has done a fair bit, without my highlighting some of the problems. Some urgent capital expenditure on the Caboolture State High School is needed. It is a 40-year old school in need of repair and it was actually denied a second round acceptance in the Secondary Schools Renewal Program in favour of schools in Ministers' seats. How many other schools have classroom flooding problems? Core learning areas are situated away from central school positions with no toilets, drinking water or staffroom facilities. The Minister thinks this school is not deserving of urgent funds. I ask him to think again.

The Caboolture East State School is still waiting for its promised building. A demountable that was there was removed some time ago. The land has been levelled and cleared, but guess what, no other building has arrived. This is adding immeasurably to the overbearing classroom numbers. That is not really conducive to good learning.

Minister, when is this school's promised building going to arrive? It has to be more than just an empty promise. That school wants the building, it needs the building, and the student numbers certainly indicate that that is what should be happening. Education is important to every child's employment prospects. I will not stop advocating for better facilities for my constituents.

The neighbours of mine in Flinders Waters in Caboolture south and in "Waytown", as it is affectionately known, are very thankful for the urban renewal program and some of the good things that that is going to bring to that area to give it a lift. It is definitely an area that is well and truly in need of an injection of some funding to lift its profile and to clean up and beautify the area and make it an area to again be proud of.

It is an area that used to be popular with a lot of younger families, but now we are getting a much older population moving into this inner Caboolture city area, mainly because they have good transport; they are close to major shopping centres, particularly the major shopping centre at Morayfield; there are good medical facilities handy; and they are very close to the Caboolture Hospital, which is definitely a plus for elderly people. So it is becoming an area that is gaining a lot of older constituents.

However, this area definitely does need to be made just a little bit more conducive to being a happy and vibrant place, and I am certainly glad that that is happening. This area is, as I said, very close to town. As a matter of fact, John Moloney, a prominent real estate agent, sold many houses around my place when I was a sergeant of police by telling the older people they had a sergeant of police living close by and that he would be looking after them. That certainly has happened, and I find that those older people certainly look after me a lot more because they are always home and they are usually watching over my place, so it has a dual effect. I am very pleased that the older members of our society are finding a lot of value there.

The urban renewal program is certainly wanted and needed there and it is certainly going to make a difference to this area of Caboolture and certainly in the Flinders Waters, Grant Road, Morayfield and Caboolture south areas. I look forward to seeing what does occur there and how this area actually lifts the profile of the town.
