



Speech by
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MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY

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BUDGET 2000

Mr BEANLAND (Indooroopilly—LP) (3.37 p.m.): There is nothing in this Budget to get Queensland moving again, after two years of Labor in Government. This is a Budget of a tired Government. It is a Budget of a Government more preoccupied with the media than with getting on with the job in Queensland, getting some substance into the Budget and doing things. It is a Budget, in fact, by a self-proclaimed media tart. I am reminded of that by those on the Government benches.

This Government is a Government of blame. The records of recent times show that, day after day, all this Government wants to do is blame someone. It seeks to blame the GST, the Federal Government or anyone but itself. It does not accept any responsibility for the fact that Queensland is falling behind other States. I think the Australian newspaper summed it up in recent days when it stated—

"Queensland's traditional economic dominance over the rest of Australia is over."

The same sorts of comments have been made by a number of media outlets, so it is not only the Opposition that sees this; it is the media and public generally in this country, and particularly in Queensland.

If one looks at the budget of the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care one sees that a lot of smoke and mirrors tricks have been used. As the leaked memo says, those opposite are to laugh off these criticisms and not let on what they know internally. That attitude is seen in the Budget papers of this particular department.

The Government seems to have produced a document based on the belief that if it says something often enough or loud enough, it will be believed. The fact of the matter is that every time the Treasurer raised his voice and sought to emphasise how clever this Government was or how caring he was towards people he was in fact concealing the reverse, as revealed by the facts. Let me cite an example. The Treasurer told us with all the sincerity he could muster that this was a people's Budget. He even repeated the phrase to make sure it was not missed the first time. He supported this absurd assertion by raving on about the implementation of the recommendations of the Forde inquiry through the allocation of an additional—according to him—\$25m for this purpose. He even had the effrontery to boast that this was \$5m more than the Beattie Government last year had foreshadowed. What the Treasurer did not tell the Parliament, the press or the people of Queensland was that the Forde inquiry recommended an additional \$103m per year for the protection of Queensland's children.

Last year, this mean-spirited Labor Government allocated a mere \$10m for this purpose—\$93m short. This year, it allocated \$25m—or \$68m short, allowing for last year's increase of \$10m. Yet it is smoke and mirrors, because the real situation is this: in two Budgets, instead of the children of Queensland being protected to the tune of \$206m, they will have received an increase of only \$35m. Children have been short-changed by this mean-spirited Beattie Labor Government to the tune of \$171m in just two Budgets. That was just one item in the Budget riddled with deception and cynical, cleverly crafted claims by this can't do Government. We all remember how the Government went on and on about how it was accepting the recommendations of the Forde inquiry, particularly this recommendation. Of course, that has not been the case at all; far from it.

If one has a look elsewhere in the portfolio statements, one sees that we are told that there will be an increase of 77 staff in this area, when in fact the staffing full-time equivalents statement on page 1.8 indicates clearly that there is an increase in staff numbers of only 59. That reminds me of last year's little effort by the Minister, where it was again indicated that there would be an increase of 70 staff members when there was an increase of only 22 staff, because there were 48 temporary staff who had been employed for some time who were to be given the sack, resulting in an increase of only 22 and not 70. Time and time again we see the same situation occurring.

For the first time for many, many years we have witnessed strikes in this department. Day after day there are rolling strikes, not just in Brisbane but also in far-north Queensland, because officers of the department are extremely stressed. There has never been a time when officers of this department have had such low morale, when they have been so stressed by this Government's requirements. This is at a time when staff are being sacked, and I will say more on that in a moment. Strikes are occurring because the Government fails to properly fund this department, which is now being faced with new legislation and new demands. It is easy to pass legislation; it is much more difficult to provide the resources, which is the real thing that counts in this field. Financial and staff resources are badly needed if the systems the Government has put in place are to be implemented. Many of the systems that have been put in place have legal requirements. If staff do not act in accordance with the legislation, they could find themselves facing all types of charges. It is little wonder that staff are so stressed, morale is so low and people are going on strike. We will see more of that over the coming months.

The ministerial portfolio statements go further with these hollow claims. The Minister tries to cover the lack of adequate resourcing of this portfolio by adopting slogans and publishing glossy plans. One example is the Putting Families First document, which is just pinched from another Labor State. In fact, I think it came from our side of the political fence originally. The Government did not even have the decency to acknowledge the source of that phrase. As a matter of fact, there is even a Budget document bearing that misleading title amongst the plethora of publications released this week.

These are some of the unpalatable truths which neither the Treasurer nor the Minister are likely to dwell on. All of this adds up to the fact that there are not enough funds in the Budget to match the Government rhetoric. The Government's actions do not match its words. In the disability services field, once again the Minister has many shortcomings. The Minister continually trumpets the Government's commitment to disability services. In last year's Budget the Minister said that there would be 571 adult lifestyle support packages at the end of the financial year to 30 June. In fact, there were only 471 packages, and this comes at a time when, according to the Government's publication—which bears the grinning faces of Premier Beattie and Minister Bligh, with both their signatures appended to the document—there were 4,229 Queensland registrants as at 22 October last year for adult lifestyle support packages. So there were 100 fewer packages made available than the number promised in the last financial year, yet if one looks at the figures, that represents only about 11% of those wishing to receive these packages. Only about 11% of the registrants—471 out of 4,229 people registered for lifestyle support packages—have actually obtained them.

What is the position with the rest of the community that has applied for these packages in the expectation that they would be considered in the foreseeable future? The community's expectations are built up time and time again. If the Government builds up people's expectations, they have to be matched. They have not been matched. The public feels let down by the Government's failure to deliver on its claims in this regard. The claims were that there would be an additional \$30m per year for lifestyle support packages. We should be up to an additional \$90m this year. In fact, that has not occurred. There was a one-off increase in the Budget in the first year of \$30m, and that has not been followed through since, with the exception of matching the Commonwealth funds this year. The funds put up by the Commonwealth had to be matched dollar for dollar.

I turn now to gambling. The documents are very quiet on gambling issues, particularly gambling addiction. A section has apparently been transferred from the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care to Treasury, which will now apparently have responsibility for responsible gambling strategies and for the funding of any initiatives to combat gambling addiction, such as the Statewide Gambling Help Line. There has been no indication of what funding will be put in place. One cannot help but notice that, at 30 June last year, the revenue from gaming machine tax was expected to be up some \$52.4m or 28%. In fact, it is up \$72m to 30 June 1999. To 30 June 2000, it is up to \$309m. Over a two-year period, it increased from \$185m to \$309m. They are the Treasurer's own figures in his own statement. There has been a \$124m increase—or 67%—in the level of gaming machine revenue. That revenue has not been matched in terms of the funding allocated to tackle gambling addiction. I know that all members are concerned about this issue, and I hope that Government members in particular will assist the Opposition in doing something about this problem.

From memory, around \$1m was apparently set aside last year for the Statewide Gambling Help Line and for gambling addiction counselling services. That is a drop in the bucket considering the

enormous amount of revenue received from gambling and the increase experienced in the past couple of years. There must be a significant increase in funding for education programs, for the Statewide Gambling Help Line and for counselling services around this State, because this is the fastest-growing addiction problem in Queensland. It afflicts both families and individuals. It does not matter what socioeconomic group people are from. Some people claim that gambling addiction afflicts the poor more than the rich, but in fact it affects people across-the-board. It is a growing problem. Unfortunately, it is a major growth industry in this State, as sad as that might be.

The problem requires expeditious Government intervention. The Government must adopt a vigorous approach to combating this problem. It is about time we started to see some educational advertising on television and some general education programs aimed at this problem. We see ads for Scratch-Its and all sorts of things on television now, not to mention poker machines and a range of gambling options. But we see nothing about the problems experienced by those who are hooked on gambling. As far as I can ascertain, the Budget is totally silent on what the Government proposes to do about this issue this year. There is no point in the Treasurer talking about the Government's responsible gambling strategy. Again, it is more rhetoric. Where are the dollars to back it up? Where are the dollars to enable us to take strenuous action on this problem? Currently no funds have been allocated in the Budget to deal with this matter.

I turn to the issue of capital works for a moment. Each year the Government likes to talk about its capital works, and even in the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care one cannot help noticing that, again, a sizeable amount of capital works has been carried forward. In fact, in the current financial year there was to be around \$18m spent on the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre. Only half of that has been spent and the remainder has been carried forward. It is all very well to talk about the Government's Capital Works Program, but if the Government is serious about creating jobs, then it would have ensured that those funds were spent last year so that those jobs were created.

If one looks elsewhere in the Budget documents, one will notice that the Minister is very concerned about the coalition's approach to families that she is now proposing that \$85,000 of taxpayers' money be spent to survey clients of the department to help Labor formulate policies for the next State election. That is what the department means when it refers to formulating policies; it is referring to Labor policies for the next State election. \$85,000 has been put aside for that. Of course, that money could have been spent on far more worthwhile projects such as funding youth workers in Cairns. As I mentioned previously in the Chamber, there has been a reduction of four youth workers in Cairns. I will say more about that shortly if I have time. We have the situation where \$85,000 has been put aside for a survey.

If the Government was really serious about generating jobs, then we would have seen very much a job creation Budget this time round and we would have seen the Government moving to stimulate the State economy. What we see is the State facing a collapse in private investment. The problem with the Government is that it does not appreciate the significance of private investment and how the real jobs are created in the community within the private investment sector. If Queensland is to catch up with the other States and resume its traditional place as the No. 1 economic powerhouse of this nation, then this Government needs to address very quickly indeed its approach to not only budgetary matters but also other matters such as workplace issues so that it attracts investment to this State that will drive the State economy.

Instead, of course, we have the second worst unemployment figures in mainland Australia. Our growth has dropped markedly. The Budget figures show that economic growth under this Government has dropped to just over half the economic growth established under the former Government. At a time when the GST and the Federal Government are blamed for everything, it is interesting to note that the unemployment rate in New South Wales and Victoria has decreased markedly. However, that has not happened in Queensland. As those two States also have Labor Governments, it shows just how out of step the Queensland Government is.

This year the output statements are contained within the Budget papers. I referred earlier to the huge number of Budget documents that have been released. If the Government wants to save some forests in Queensland, it need look only at the number of Budget papers produced. Because the information contained in those documents and the way it is presented is of minimal use, it serves little purpose to present them in the current format.

In the output statements for the Families, Youth and Community Care portfolio a range of new measures have been included in place of some of the measures that existed previously. Again, this makes it more confusing. More meaningful measures that should have been included would have been the number of child protection cases notified. As far as services for children and young people are concerned, it is estimated that last financial year the number was 18,120, but there is no indication of the number of those cases that were followed up or investigated. Were they all followed up or only some of them? What happened as a result of that follow-up? In how many cases were children

removed from their parents? How many parents or guardians were prosecuted in relation to those matters?

The material that was included in the statements is of little value in the format in which it was presented to the Parliament. The amount of information in the documentation is insufficient. The smoke and mirrors part of the Budget is presented, but not the meaningful information which would enable members to gain some knowledge of the issues in the community.

I mention again the hostels task force. There seems to be nothing in the Budget on that issue. The task force still has not reported, even though it is well over a month since it was set up. The Government indicated at that time that it did not need to have a royal commission or inquiry. The Ministers knew the issues; they knew the problems. It was simply a matter of getting together and presenting the issues to Cabinet and coming forward with the recommendations. Those recommendations have not yet appeared. The way the situation is progressing, there seems to be less likelihood than ever that they will. The Government has run away from this issue for over a decade.

I conclude by referring to the youth workers situation at the Cairns office. The member for Cairns and the Minister seem to be very prickly on this matter. They like to stand in this Chamber and tell members about a small part of the real situation. The Cairns area office will lose four full-time youth workers on 21 July. That is a fact. I have noticed that the member for Cairns and the Minister do not mention that. Youth workers have been taken away from Yarrabah in order to replace youth workers in other locations. So we now have a situation in which the Yarrabah service has been reduced from six days a week to four days a week without any community consultation at all. This has compromised the youth program at Yarrabah. No further resources were allocated for youth workers or vehicles. Apparently due to political pressure, the department has now been forced to provide a service at the Wangetti Education Centre. The arrangement is that the youth workers work with the Wangetti clients on community-based orders every Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., much to the detriment of the service provided to Yarrabah. No mention has been made of that.

Time expired.
