



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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BUDGET 2000

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (4.44 p.m.): As I have said in previous Budget debates, if there is one thing I know absolutely nothing about, it is Budgets and how they are worked out. I have read a lot of information on this Budget, I have read a lot of the things that have been put out and I have listened to a lot of the things that have been said. I am not an economist. About a thousand black holes could be hidden in a Budget and I would never be able to find them. Like a lot of people who came to see me before I came to Parliament for this sitting, I was concerned over the leaked memorandum. When most Queenslanders sat back and read the Courier-Mail or whatever other newspapers printed that story, I am sure that they asked themselves the question: what is this thing that we know internally? They would have been thinking: Governments lie to people; tax is theft, and all that sort of stuff. These are fundamental truths that we all grow to accept as citizens. There is nothing more tyrannical than a democratically elected Government. I will not argue with the way the Government expends money or the way the Government decides it is going to spend money, but I will argue that at least every electorate should get an equitable share.

From the brief look at the Budget that I and those I have had go through the Budget for me have had, on the tablelands we have not done too badly. A lot of programs up there are ongoing and have been funded. I might disagree with the Minister for Transport on a lot of occasions, but I cannot disagree that there are a lot of roadworks currently under way around the tablelands. I live in the township of Malanda; my office is in the township of Mareeba. They are about 70 kilometres apart. I drive through about three or four Main Roads construction sites where roads that have not been upgraded for 12 years are being upgraded. This is all part of the sugar roads money and so on and so forth. So a lot of money is being expended in maintaining and, in some cases, upgrading our road system on the tablelands. This is a lot more than was done in the 12 years of the previous member for Tablelands, which is an indication of what he managed to achieve in his wonderful time as the member. So, from that point of view, the tablelands is getting its fair share of money.

One of the areas of concern that I am becoming interested in at the moment is the Kuranda Range bypass. I want to say this to the Minister as he is currently in the Chamber. It is not because I am against the whole concept of building a road up at the Kuranda Range; I am all for it. What I want to see and what I want to make sure happens is that we get the right road access up to the tablelands so that we do not just help the township of Kuranda, which is the main access point for Cairns. The whole concept is to build a growth node at Kuranda and so on and so forth so that the whole of the Tablelands can move things off the tablelands.

If you ask a tablelander why they want to get down to Cairns, it is so that they can move produce or goods, and that stuff will not be able to be moved properly through a tunnel. Dangerous goods like fertiliser or diesel cannot be carried through a tunnel. I know that it is an ongoing concern and that there is still a lot to be done and a lot to be thought about. I have chosen the option that I am going to nail my cross to, and that is the Davies Creek bypass. I think it is a viable option. It is a lot more cost effective. I encourage anybody interested in the subject—such as the member for Mulgrave or the member for Barron River—to perhaps go back over it and have a rethink. I do not think the tunnel option can be built, and I do not think it is the best option for the tablelands. That is my opinion.

This morning we were talking about sugar. Sugarcane is an industry that has come up to the tablelands. I remember, as a few other people have said, when there was no sugarcane on the tablelands. Now there are absolutely tonnes of it. This is a very big issue. The sugar industry, like every other industry, is coming under attack. It is sad that we have to bail out these industries these days. We are always looking at providing bail-out packages—for example, to the tobacco industry and the dairy industry. All these industries are deserving of bail-out packages now, whereas in the old days we used to just subsidise them. So in one way we are paying out money to bail them out; in the other way we were paying out money to subsidise them. Again, I am not an economist. I do not have a degree. I probably do not know what I am talking about. But to me it does not make sense that we spend millions of dollars bailing out industries when, in the old days, we spent X amount of dollars subsidising them.

While I have the attention of the Minister for Education, I will mention the ongoing saga of the Malanda manual arts block. I had a bit of a tiff with the Treasurer last Budget over this issue. It is finally being built. Here we are, in probably the last Budget that I will get to speak to in this sitting of Parliament, and now they are finally starting to turn sods on that manual arts block. I thank the Minister for that. I know the people at Malanda State High School are very appreciative of that.

I must say that, of all the Ministers I deal with—which, believe it or not, is not very many—the Minister for Education is the only one who has bothered personally to phone me back and take up issues when I have raised them with him. One such issue is Bibbohra State School. It still has problems. However, I know those problems are being addressed, because I have spoken to key people who are moving and grooving to make sure the problems are addressed. Although I did not realise this a couple of years ago, I now accept that this is a slow process; there is a trickle-down effect. But things are getting done with respect to education. I receive very few complaints from the schools in my area, apart from the usual one, namely, that they would like more money.

Another problem concerns infrastructure. The Government plans to bring in 800 more teachers. Will the infrastructure be put in place to ensure that those 800 teachers have classrooms in which to teach? I am sure bigger and better people than I have thought about this matter, and I am sure it will be an issue that is addressed.

Another issue that I wish to speak about is police. I note that the Police Minister is not in the Chamber. A subject that will generate interest over the next few sittings of Parliament is the Mareeba Watch-house. I urge any member of the ALP to drop in to the Mareeba Watch-house and have a look at it. It is Third World standard. I have seen better lock-ups in Third World countries. I have no love for criminals at all, and I think they should be treated terribly. But this lock-up is of a very poor standard. It needs to be addressed urgently. I have not been able to find it mentioned in the Budget papers. Perhaps the Treasurer could point it out to me. The Mareeba Watch-house is certainly an issue that needs to be addressed.

As to police numbers on the tablelands, I must declare that I have a conflict of interest in that my father is included on the Eacham roster. I am not speaking on his behalf, I am speaking on behalf of the citizens of Yungaburra. Dad has to do about an extra 10 hours' overtime every time they get a call for Yungaburra; he has to race over and do the shift.

The simple fact is that we need more police officers. I accept it can take a long time for a police officer to take up a new posting, but Yungaburra has gone without a police officer for too long. I am not going to make a song and dance out of this, but I want the Police Minister to have a look at the situation. Hopefully, he will be able to make sure that this is addressed. I am pretty sure the police officer has been selected. He needs to be transferred from Croydon to Yungaburra. Let us get that done. The people of Yungaburra have gone without a police officer for far too long. Anyone who knows the area that I am talking about knows that there is a fair bit of difference between Malanda, Yungaburra and Millaa Millaa. When two officers have to cover that large an area, that places a great burden on the people doing that job regardless of how good they are.

I acknowledge the concerns that have been raised by the Opposition in relation to whether we have been told the whole story. I am sure time will tell whether there has been any underhanded dealing or whether the Treasurer is trying to hide things. If so, we will find out about it in the near future; somebody will uncover it.

The Health Minister is in the Chamber. I take this opportunity to refer again to my ongoing battles over hospitals on the tablelands. Dialysis is one issue. I have raised all of these issues with the Health Minister and I will continue to do so. She will continue to show her usual colours on this issue.

Mrs Edmond: They have had more money spent there in the last year than they have in 10 years.

Mr NELSON: The Health Minister has her side of the story; I have mine. I am now having a lot more contact with nurses and other staff from the hospital who are coming to me out of frustration or anger, and I am now able to piece together the real story. I assure them that I will be monitoring the

situation as we go along to make sure that we get what we deserve in the end. Good things come to those who wait.

Suffice it to say that I have no real problems with the Budget. The tablelands has maintained its level of spending and, in some cases, it is doing a lot better. I think that is a message to the people of the electorate: since electing me—someone other than the previous National Party member—they have been getting a level of representation that they have not had for 12 years.

Mr Kaiser: And a State Labor Government.

Mr NELSON: I have to admit that they have done better out of this Labor Government than they ever did out of a National Party Government. However, I will not be voting with it any more often. Suffice it to say that this is being remarked on in the tablelands—blue-ribbon National Party heartland. It is heartening to see that these infrastructure projects are in place. However, we cannot allow the Government to slacken off. Apart from the few points that I mentioned, life is pretty good and we will continue to be monitoring all of these things to make sure they get done.
