



Speech by

ELISA ROBERTS

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

Hansard 5 June 2003

STATE BUDGET 2003-04

Miss ELISA ROBERTS (Gympie—Ind) (11.58 p.m.): I rise this evening to provide my response to the budget and to comment on the impact it will have on the people who make up the electorate of Gympie. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the \$3.5 million which has been allocated to the redevelopment of Gympie Hospital as part of a promise made by the Minister for Health last year to spend \$5.5 million on a new operating theatre, image facility and a central sterilising supply department. I must also take this opportunity to thank the minister for taking on board the concerns of the new hospital medical superintendent, the community, junior medical doctors and myself over the lack of senior medical staff at the hospital. We now have six senior doctors on the staff. This is a great step towards reversing the previous trend of understaffing and inadequate resources, which was the case when I was first elected.

To continue in the new positive direction of health care in the Gympie electorate, oral services will be receiving \$5 million across the state in order to reduce the four-year waiting lists. The employment of two new dentists in Gympie, who are due to move into their relocated dental clinic section of the hospital, is reassuring for many locals who have been waiting years to see their positions on the waiting list move closer to the top.

The old dental rooms will be amalgamated into the emergency department, thus increasing the size and overall capacity of the department. Emergency departments across the state will see \$2.2 million allocated to assist with the increasing demand. However, it is hoped that all emergency departments will receive some portion of this funding and that it will not be reserved for the selected few.

Another aspect of the budget in regard to Health that is commendable is the continuation of the elective surgery enhancement initiative, which is aimed at reducing waiting times for elective surgery in Queensland's public hospitals. I hope that with a commitment of \$10 million to the initiative we will see a real reduction in the waiting times for surgery for the people whom I represent. On a personal level, I am pleased to see that the demand for increased oncology services and cancer care has been recognised with a \$13.2 million injection of funds. As well, after representations by community members, me and others, there is \$13.1 million set aside for renal dialysis treatment for both hospital and home based services. Once again, it is hoped that Gympie will benefit in some way from this funding.

However, it is disappointing to see that Gympie was not included in the new community positions in adult acute services funding for mental health services. But at least the \$8.4 million commitment shows that the government has recognised the increasing need for and importance of mental health care services throughout Queensland.

Other areas which have received increased funding and which will benefit the Gympie electorate include the Home and Community Care Program, with an additional \$3.6 million to enable increased access to the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. This is a godsend for many people within my electorate. During a public meeting I convened last year, one of the main concerns for people in areas such as Tin Can Bay and Rainbow Beach was the lack of transport available for people to get to and from medical appointments.

The next area in which the Gympie electorate has seen benefit is in capital works for policing. Of the \$9 million needed to build the new police station and watch-house in Gympie, another \$500,000

has been allocated on top of last year's \$492,000. Whilst there is still a long way to go before we will see the completion of the station, with around \$8 million still needed, at least the ball is rolling, albeit slowly.

Due to the increasing requirement for extra police north of my electorate in areas such as Tin Can Bay and Rainbow Beach, the Police Minister has made a commitment to build a new station at Rainbow Beach, with an initial grant of \$100,000 allocated towards the total cost of \$590,000 for the building. The necessity for a station to be located in this section of my electorate stems from the distance between it and Gympie, which is approximately a 45-minute drive. Recently, there were two concurrent incidents, one at Tin Can Bay and one in the main street of Gympie. Because all of the rostered police were attending the incident at Tin Can Bay, there were no officers to attend the one in Gympie until five hours later. The new police station will be very much appreciated by residents and police from both ends of the electorate. At the opposite but no less beautiful end of my electorate, Pomona is to also receive a replacement station, with \$135,000 allocated towards its establishment, the total cost of which is estimated at around \$390,000.

In regard to the huge demand for public housing in my community, on behalf of my constituents I am extremely grateful to the Minister for Housing for listening to concerns raised regarding the lack of adequate housing in the region. This budget has allocated funding to enable approximately nine units to be built. This is very timely as the waiting list for public housing in my electorate is at around 284 and access to private accommodation has been exceedingly difficult and is often way outside the price range for many seeking to rent.

Interestingly, 62.5 per cent of capital works funding is earmarked for outside the Brisbane Statistical Division. These statistics are particularly welcomed by rural and regional residents, who often feel disfranchised due to their locality.

Turning to the vital area of education, there are no real outstanding benefits for the Gympie electorate, apart from a share, which is split between four schools, of the \$235,000 that the Noosa District State High School is to receive for upgrading the Special Education Unit. The Two Mile State School located in Gympie has also been granted necessary funding to be repainted.

One bone of contention, however, for my local students is the lack of airconditioning. The heat in summer months is stifling for these students and for some reason none of these schools has been provided with airconditioning. I sincerely hope that with the \$16.7 million provided for the purpose of continuing with the Cooler Schools program the Education Minister finally concedes that the children of Gympie electorate are important and deserve the same working conditions as children in every other area of the state.

Another area of special interest to the people of my electorate is Disability Services. This is one area which has been severely lacking. I know the Minister for Disability Services repeatedly refers to the fact that this department receives more money than it ever did under previous coalition governments, but this is of little interest to the many families waiting for assistance. There is no point dwelling on the past and on what other people did or did not do; the point is that currently Disability Services Queensland is one of the lowest funded disability departments in the whole of Australia. Historical comparisons of funding regimes are cold comfort to people in need today.

People with disabilities, along with children, are the most vulnerable people in society. These are the people who cannot fend for themselves. This state and, most importantly, my electorate do not have sufficient respite care facilities, and the disability lifestyle support packages do not support anywhere near enough clients. One of the greatest fears for families of a person with a disability is the uncertainty of the future. The uncertainty of whether or not their son or daughter will be looked after adequately should they ever be without their family support is not being alleviated by the current DSQ programs.

For the majority of service providers within my electorate there is the belief that there is a huge disparity in the dissemination of funding throughout the region. There is concern about whether Gympie will get its fair share of the 100 lifestyle packages that have been offered. This is one area which I hope has been addressed in the department's funding reform project initiative.

Whilst this budget has been of some benefit to the Gympie electorate, it has done very little for rural residents, whose livelihoods are reliant upon farming. In fact, this government has done even less in the last two budgets to provide farmers with even a glimmer of hope that their farming futures are safe. The imposition of additional charges to farmers from food safety to water to land clearing and, last but not least, the compulsory payment, levy or tax—whatever we want to call it; they all have the same meaning—for our Ambulance Service has put more and more pressure on farming communities throughout Queensland.

The Agforce lobby group has stated that it appears that \$7 million has disappeared from the Department of Primary Industries and has been diverted to the Department of Natural Resources in order to help fund the money allocated to prosecute farmers for illegal land clearing. What most farmers

I have talked to cannot understand is that, whilst they appreciate the need for competition, rather than making it easier for them to compete with other producers their government is doing everything in its power to make it not just difficult but impossible for them to do so. I know this is hard for government members to believe, but this is not a political issue; this is just the reality of what farmers are facing and thinking today.

To witness a close friend in tears because of the situation her parents are facing while trying to hang on to their farm, which has survived through two world wars and a depression, is heartbreaking. Since I have been elected, I have heard so many speeches from this side of the House practically begging this government to reassess its views about farmers and their needs, and we have all continued to be ignored. It was always my view that governments of all political persuasions were there to look out for their constituents no matter who they were. I have learnt that, sadly, this is not always the case.

I have a simple way of judging whether or not a budget is a good one for my electorate. Do the people of Gympie have access to the same services at the same standard and with the same accessibility as their Brisbane counterparts, considering that we are all Queenslanders and that we all pay the same taxes, fees and charges? With this budget the answer is, no, this government still has a little way to go.