



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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### STATE BUDGET 2004

**Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (11.11 p.m.): I rise this evening to speak on the 2004-05 budget. I must say that, of all the banter that has gone on in this place surrounding this budget, nothing has been more entertaining than the tag team verbal wrestling match between the Queensland pairing of Terry Mackenroth and Peter Beattie and the southern challenge of Michael Egan and John Brumby. The stoush that is a deep-seated rift stretching back to 2001 has been ignited again by the on-the-surface success—and I stress on-the-surface success—of this budget. The latest instalment in this battle was from the New South Wales Treasurer, Michael Egan, in Wednesday's *Sydney Morning Herald*. In the article, the esteemed Treasurer of our southern neighbour labelled all states, aside from New South Wales and Victoria, as mendicants. As much as I applaud his theological insight, I find it staggering that a Labor Party Treasurer would use this particular example.

A mendicant by definition was originally the name given to a monk who relied solely on voluntary contributions. So Mr Egan is criticising other states for taking on voluntary donations from his state. Correct me if I am wrong, but I thought a voluntary donation is given on the basis that the person volunteering the donation is happy to do so. Maybe he should not give these voluntary donations anymore if he is so unhappy about them, or maybe Mr Egan should find analogies that he knows the meaning of.

For the Queensland Labor tag team, Mr Mackenroth hit back saying that we are the low-tax state, though trying to tell that to the three per cent of Queensland businesses who foot the \$1.3 billion in state payroll tax is a much tougher ask. He also had a swipe at the two big states, saying that most people in New South Wales and Victoria live in capital cities. Not quite as eloquent as the mendicant comment but certainly easier understood. Furthermore, on Wednesday morning the Premier took a question from my esteemed colleague Bob Quinn and stood in this place and admitted that he would not sign the GST agreement until he got his own way—until he got more money. One thing that the Premier failed to add in his speech, which leads us to believe it may not have happened, is that he did not even say thankyou to the federal government. He admits that the Queensland government received over and above what it normally would have, yet it would seem he failed to use his manners.

It also seems like the Queensland pairing in the tag team match against the southern pairing of Egan and Brumby are winning this battle. At one stage in an interview on the 26 March 2004 edition of *PM*, Mr Egan said of the carve-up of GST money—

I feel like slitting my wrists.

To have driven him to that, the Premier and Treasurer must have been quite ruthless. I join my federal colleague Peter Costello in saying to Michael Egan that he should reconsider that idea of slitting his wrists. I also urge Mr Egan to stop blaming Queensland for taking all of what he says is his money. The reason for this is if perchance New South Wales does take back the money Mr Egan wants then Queensland will be in a terrible position. While members opposite are heralding Mr Mackenroth as the AAA Treasurer—and I have also heard around the place that this is an A+ budget—we must look at how the mark was achieved. I must say that it is very easy to achieve high marks when you get so much help off the teacher.

In this case, it is the federal government which is giving our state government all of the answers by providing it with windfall after windfall over and above what Queensland would normally get. But then the conniving student—the state government—is not satisfied with receiving extra help from the teacher, so they then have to make sure that they receive a good mark by cheating on the test. This cheating is in the form of unfair taxes. The ambulance tax that is costing Queenslanders at least \$88 and soon \$90.20 on their electricity bill and more than that if you have multiple bills is one such tax. Payroll tax is another which may be the best in Australia, but with all due respect all the treasurers in Australian states are Labor Party members so it is still poor economic practice at its current levels. We should be providing relief to businesses which are deterred from expanding by this burdensome tax. In fact, despite all of the goodwill of the federal government, Queensland is the only state to raise taxes since the introduction of the GST.

This state government receives more help than any other student from the teacher—and it has also been caught cheating on its tests—however, it is still not satisfied. It has to rely on other people to do its assignments for it. As Mr Mackenroth himself has admitted, the surplus this year was driven by a booming property market and equity markets. It is very easy to deliver a surplus given favourable circumstances beyond your control. Just as in all of Mr Mackenroth's budgets, this year tax was received at a higher rate than was budgeted for. A huge chunk of this tax windfall was courtesy of stamp duty which was fuelled by federal government initiatives such as the first home buyers grant, not to mention a robust economy through years of brilliant financial management by the coalition government in Canberra. So I urge the southern states: hands off our money. We need it to provide insurance against the vacuum of fiscal acumen on the other side of this chamber.

Looking through the budget papers, I find many things very interesting. One of the staggering things was that I read and read and read and I realised more and more that the Labor Party has learnt nothing from its 13 years of financial mismanagement in federal government—that is, that the ALP still sticks to its economic principle of 'more money will solve the problem'. More money for education is great. However, when the money is flung in a haphazard fashion, such as it is in this budget, it is of no use at all. This leads me to the next staggering point. On the issue of the education spending in this budget, I find myself agreeing with the Queensland Teachers Union President, Julie-Ann McCullough. There I was listening to the radio on Wednesday morning and I could pre-empt her comments as she was saying them—that is, reducing class sizes is great but means nothing without addressing the issue of behavioural management.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I will come to that. Teachers I have discussed the issue with say that it is better to have 29 well-behaved children as opposed to 23 with several troublemakers. It almost seems as though this government is inviting industrial action. Smaller class sizes and better behaved children are of twofold benefit: first, teachers are able to teach more effectively and enjoy their work more, which has great social industrial benefits; and, second, students' performance will improve. This second point is particularly poignant when one looks at other figures in the output statement in the Education and Arts portfolio.

The results for the year 3 diagnostic test are quite impressive with 90.9 per cent of students reaching the national benchmark for numeracy and 92.8 per cent reaching the national benchmark for reading. By the time the children reach year 5, though, only 84.2 per cent of children are reaching the benchmark for numeracy. This is the equivalent of two in every classroom in the state falling off the pace between years 3 and 5. In the area of writing, only 78.6 per cent of students achieve the national benchmark for reading in year 5. This is the equivalent of four students in every classroom in the state falling off the pace in writing skills between years 3 and 5. Maybe if the Queensland government is serious about giving children a fair go, it should invest in practical solutions for these problems and benefit teachers at the same time rather than endangering the future of our state.

Moreover, I found it very interesting that in the same publication it is stated that five and a half thousand more students attended university this year than were expected. More interesting still was the fact that the Education Minister is predicting an increase of one and a half thousand students for the coming year. This estimate is coming from the ALP education brains trust whose federal friends were driving the scare campaign against university reform at the federal level. On 7 November last year, that 'amazing' parliamentary performer, Jenny Macklin, issued a press release that is still available on everyone's favourite web site, [www.alp.org.au](http://www.alp.org.au)—a web site with some pearler quotes. I will refer to some of the highlights.

Ms Macklin stated in that document that, under the federal government's package, there will be fewer Australians at university. The Queensland Education Minister does not seem to think so, as indicated by these figures. Macklin went on to state that the reforms will diminish the number of Australians getting a degree. At page 1-67 of Minister Bligh's portfolio brief, she does not seem to indicate that at all, with her conservative estimate being a rise in line with population increases. Considering that last year's estimate was 5,500 too low, we could be in for a bigger increase. A year earlier there was a statement released from Ms Macklin's office carrying the name of Ms Bligh which indicated that, when talking of who can enter university, the federal government's reforms would exacerbate the disadvantage that is already being

experienced. Again, that statement does not measure up with the predicted rise in the student population in Ms Bligh's own budget publication.

For all of those students at university campuses, I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is that all of those pesky protesters, some of whom live in Ms Bligh's own electorate and who sullied the name of students by gatecrashing vice-chancellors' meetings and lying across roads, have had their arguments contradicted by people of their own persuasion in this place who, through these figures, admit that university places will not go down. The bad news is that there will now be more students at university, thanks to the Howard government reforms. So it will be harder to find a car park on campus.

The people of the electorate of Surfers Paradise will no doubt have to fend for themselves again as the state government gave them a raw deal. Although I am thankful for the limited amount of money that will go to the schools at Benowa and Bellevue Park, I will wait and see when that happens. The residents in the electorate have had to put up with promises from this government that are a long time coming. One such example is the duplication of the Ross Street bridge, which has been earmarked for duplication since the start of this government and had money allocated to it in the last budget. In fact, I remember a friend and patient of mine, Peter Bourke, who was the Labor candidate in Nerang in 1998, having a protest sit-in by the side of the road when he ran in that election campaign. We still do not have the duplication of the Ross Street bridge. If the classrooms are delayed as long as the duplication of the bridge has been delayed, the students of Benowa and Bellevue Park primary schools could build their own houses before the classrooms are built.

Although the Gold Coast is also thankful for the upgrading of the Southport Police Station, I urge the government to consider a new police station in the suburbs of Benowa or Ashmore. At present, those suburbs are serviced by the Southport and Surfers Paradise police stations, which are 15 minutes away. In fact, Sorrento is serviced by Broadbeach Police Station. I feel that it is time that that situation is changed.

I thank the Treasurer for the funding for schoolies week, for the establishment of a cardiac ward at the Gold Coast Hospital, and for continuing the Indy funding, but remind him that it is a whole Gold Coast event so the funding can be divided among at least eight electorates. Yet only Surfers Paradise residents are asked to sacrifice more green space at MacIntosh Park to accommodate the V8 Supercars.

The main problem in Surfers Paradise is traffic, as the coast experiences severe growing pains. I find it saddening that road funding is now almost half the proportion of the capital works budget that it used to be as a result of this year's allocations. There are serious traffic issues all over the state and this budget is not an indication that this government wants them to improve.

We have also suffered from water restrictions due to a lack of infrastructure on the Gold Coast. It is also saddening that there is only a paltry \$7 million allocated for new investment in capital works for water under this budget. The coast then cops another kick in the pants from the government as the budget brings about a reduction in real terms in tourism funding. Tourism is the lifeblood of the Gold Coast, along with construction, and the Surfers Paradise electorate swells to triple its size during peak seasons. Yet despite the fact that the Tourism Minister is apparently a Gold Coast minister, tourism and the south coast are overlooked. Maybe the minister has not been south of Yatala for a while, but she needs to get some more of the budgetary pie for tourism to help it and what is considered her area to flourish.

In the end the budget is, as the Treasurer said, a very good Labor budget—that is, of course, if his definition of a very good Labor budget includes the fact that the government is slugging businesses with payroll tax. The budget is good if we consider taxing families over \$500 more this year and being the only state to do so as a positive. The budget is also fantastic if one of the criteria is how little foresight was used in the allocation of money. As any normal person would not consider these valid criteria, this is not a good normal person's budget, while it may very well be a good Labor budget. I think that the tag team of the Premier and Treasurer should set an example by having the manners to say thankyou to the greatest tag team of all, Prime Minister Howard and federal Treasurer Peter Costello.