



Speech by  
**Neil Roberts**

**MEMBER FOR NUDGE**

Hansard Thursday, 25 November 2004

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**APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 2); APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL  
(NO. 2)**

**Mr NEIL ROBERTS** (Nudgee—ALP) (3.06 p.m.): I have just listened to two exceptionally negative, carping and whingeing contributions from the members for Callide and Darling Downs. No wonder the vote of confidence they have received from the Queensland public is six per cent. I want to pick up on a couple of the points made by the member for Callide. He made a particular point about the \$2.4 billion hospital capital works program under the coalition government. The facts of the matter are that a \$10 billion capital works program of hospital renewal was commenced under the Goss government before the coalition came into power. The big capital works decision of the coalition in 1996-97 was to continue with a \$10 billion decision of a Labor government.

The other issue I want to pick up on is that related to Suncorp Stadium. The member spent a fair bit of time criticising that particular stadium as though it was a waste of time. It is interesting to go back to the contribution the member for Gregory made concerning Suncorp Stadium in October last year. The member for Gregory went to the Rugby Union World Cup and told us about it on that evening. I will quote his words to show the difference of opinion on Suncorp Stadium between members of the National Party. The member for Gregory stated—

My colleague the honourable member for Toowoomba South and I had the pleasure of watching one of the most enjoyable games of football anybody has ever witnessed in this state when the USA played Fiji in the World Cup at Lang Park this evening.

He went on to state—

I have to say to the government today that that stadium is absolutely magnificent.

**Mr Johnson** interjected.

**Mr NEIL ROBERTS:** That is fine. It highlights again the contradictory messages that the National Party is sending out to the people of Queensland. That is one of the fundamental reasons its vote is stuck at six per cent and heading down.

The other issue I want to touch on relates to dividends from the electricity industry, and again the member for Callide totally misrepresented the facts of this matter. The government has a very clear policy of extracting dividends after the electricity authorities have made decisions about maintenance, capital works programs, et cetera. The difference between what we do and what the coalition did is exemplified by what it did in the two years it was in power—that is, not have a measured program of dividend extraction but rather rip \$850 million out of the electricity industry in a two-year period. Once again, the National Party position on this issue just shows the hypocrisy of the position it has adopted.

In my contribution today I want to highlight the strong economic credentials of the Beattie Labor government—economic credentials which are founded upon the Smart State agenda which is driven by a Premier who is passionate about creating an environment for sustainable economic growth for future generations of Queenslanders and also a Treasurer who has delivered sound financial management and control for this state. Some of the key highlights of our current economic performance include a record budget surplus of \$3.34 billion and also a AAA credit rating, a far cry from the dismal performance of the

National and Liberal Party coalition when it was in government just a few short years ago. Just to recall one of the key indicators, under the coalition in 1996-97 unemployment topped 9.5 per cent and it is now almost half that level.

The Smart State agenda is the foundation of Queensland's current economic performance. Whereas the Smart State agenda is many things, in essence it is about one thing, and that is the creation of jobs, and the Premier made that point very well earlier in the week. The recent unemployment figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics underpin the success of the Smart State agenda in addressing the issue of employment growth. Our trend unemployment rate is now five per cent—the best in the country and the lowest for 26 years. Of all of the full-time jobs created in Australia over the past year, 55 per cent of them were created in Queensland. Additionally, our businesses and our industries have also helped create 44 per cent of all jobs created in the nation. Our annual jobs growth rate is at 5.1 per cent, which is more than double the national average of 2.2 per cent.

The Queensland economy has never been healthier and the Queensland government's budget position has never been healthier, and it has all been achieved under the discipline and policy initiatives of a state Labor government which is now recognised as the natural party of good economic management. The last budget forecast under the Borbidge-Sheldon government in 1997 predicted that unemployment, then at record levels of 9.5 per cent, would rise to 9.7 per cent and employment growth would slow to 1.25 per cent. They were tired and negative assumptions from a tired and negative government. It took the enthusiasm and positive outlook of an incoming Labor government to inject some energy back into the economy. Before we were elected the now Premier set an ambitious target of a five per cent unemployment rate, which has now been achieved, and also set about encouraging and supporting the creation and establishment of new industries in Queensland.

There are two areas where there has been significant success, and they are in biotechnology and aviation. In aviation alone, around 8,000 new jobs have been created, and that is quite a remarkable performance—a remarkable performance that has been achieved in partnership with the private sector. As well as focusing on the economic fundamentals, the government has ensured that service delivery has been improved. Again, I want to highlight some significant achievements and advances across some major portfolio areas. Since the current Treasurer was appointed in 2001, spending has increased in Education by 26 per cent, Health by 27 per cent, Disability Services by 66 per cent and public order and safety by 39 per cent—all in a period where inflation was a little over 10 per cent.

**Mr Wallace:** That says it all.

**Mr NEIL ROBERTS:** It says it all. As I said, inflation was a little over 10 per cent and some of these increases were double and in some cases six times the previous amount. Good economic management is now recognised as going hand in hand with a state Labor government, and in Queensland that is largely the result of our Smart State agenda which is helping to deliver strong and sustainable jobs growth across the state. These appropriation bills provide a bit more money to enable the good work to continue. Accordingly, I commend the bills to the House.