



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (9.37 pm): The great US inventor Thomas Edison, who invented the phonograph in 1876 and the electric light in 1879, once remarked, 'People miss opportunity because it is dressed in overalls and looks like hard work.' There could be no more apt explanation for the state government's actions in this budget, which is more notable for what is absent than for what it provides. Members had to sit here and listen as the Premier and Treasurer gloated about the worth of this budget and the great things that would come as a result of the plans outlined in the documents we were given.

This time and this budget are set against the backdrop of what can only be described as an economic dream run. With mining royalties providing a sound source of revenue for the state government and the housing boom providing the government with significant windfalls from its countless taxes and levies designed to take full benefit of the housing sector's prosperity, the Treasurer has had an opportunity to, in his own words, 'present a budget that will do more than any other in living memory to shape the future of Queensland'. I am careful with my wording there. I reiterate that the Treasurer, in such an economic climate as is present, had the opportunity to present that type of budget. Unfortunately, in the words of Edison, because taking that opportunity would have required hard work, planning and implementation, this budget is happy to cruise through in a workmanlike fashion and will go down, not as a significantly reforming or shaping budget, however, just as the budget of 2005-06—not particularly distinguished above any other.

This is disappointing because, as the people of Queensland are no doubt aware through the skiting and bragging of the Premier and the Treasurer, this is on the back of a record surplus that is likely to be bigger when the final wash-up is delivered in November this year. This is a big opportunity to make a big difference in Queensland, and these are not opportunities that come along very often. Indeed, with the cooling down of the housing market and with resource prices set to plateau in the near future, there will not be another opportunity like this in the foreseeable future.

Not to worry, though, the Premier and the Treasurer have decided to rest on their laurels and not exert too much energy into making a reasonably good budget a historic budget. So, before I begin looking at whether perhaps there were missed opportunities, I would like to acknowledge that there are some good aspects to this budget. That must be recognised, and I will by no means stand up here and say that this is worthless, but to temper that I will say that is expected from a government. It is no mean feat to provide a budget that is not a disaster, and one should be congratulated for that. The problem is that this budget does not extend itself into a budget worthy of praise.

I ask the people of Queensland, before they accept the rhetoric effused by members opposite, to look at how these projects affect their everyday lives. For all of the glossy brochures and fancy artwork, for all of the acronyms in working groups with modern phrases and terminology, when it all boils down, are these figures and phrases translating into tangible benefits for the everyday lives of Queenslanders? Most Queenslanders are not seeing these benefits translated into things that help them every day when they have to wait for hours on end in a hospital waiting room to receive attention. The money and the figures on these handouts mean nothing to them when they do not benefit Queenslanders where they need it most.

On the Gold Coast, local residents are not going to sing the praises of a budget that delivers no immediate tangible benefit to their lives. When they are waiting in traffic to get to work in central Surfers Paradise again, or again waiting in the outpatients section at the Gold Coast Hospital, or if their children do not have soap to clean their hands at a local school, this budget and booming praise that the Treasurer receives from high-end financial journals will not mean a thing.

The Leader of the Opposition talked this morning about getting back to the basics, and if we do not get the basics right then the budget does not mean anything. This is true, and this neglect of the fundamentals of Queensland and the lack of repair and reinforcement in this budget for the foundations of our state will be seen cruelly through the critical eye of history and retrospect. It would be interesting dinner party conversation between the Labor premiers and treasurers at the moment when discussing Queensland's lion's share of the GST revenue, which of course is another significant contributing factor to the economic sunshine in this state. The other states, of course, are saying that achieving budget surpluses in Queensland with the skewed allocation of GST money is like facing a fourth grade medium-paced bowler on the Pacific Highway—not a particularly onerous task.

The response and the line that has been well tried by the Queensland government is that we only get what we deserve. With 700 people moving here every week, of course, that money should go into Queensland as we need to provide infrastructure. Using that 'what we deserve line', though, is fraught with danger. Using it in an intrastate context, I would contend that the Gold Coast should be receiving the majority of that money because the largest proportion of those 700 people a week moving to Queensland are moving to the Gold Coast. If the government can say to other states, 'We deserve extra money because we are growing,' I will say exactly the same thing to the Premier and the Treasurer on behalf of the Gold Coast. In fact, in his diatribe—sorry, budget reply speech, entitled 'The history of the Liberal Party: how to avoid gaping budget holes in your area by speaking about irrelevant piffle', the member for Southport said that he is the representative of a growing electorate that is surrounded by even more growing electorates. He went on to enunciate that this is the reason why the southern states should keep quiet when talking about Queensland receiving more money. After listening to his 10 minutes of verbal offal, it was interesting to hear the member for Southport remark that Queensland receives extra money under the federal government's distribution model because there are a significant number of people moving to the Gold Coast.

Instead of being titillated by his fixation with the internal workings of the Liberal Party, perhaps the member should realise that it is the growth in his electorate, and my electorate and those around us, that is the reason for Queensland receiving extra funding. He should also realise that very little of that money the Gold Coast effectively earns for the government is actually being put back there. How long did we have to call for the duplication of the rail line before it was delivered by the government? There are articles dating back over three years of the Brisbane-Robina route being named the Bombay Express because passengers are forced to stand up for the 70-minute journey from Central to Robina. Even now it will be four years, or over 1,000 working days and peak hour trips, before the rail line will be duplicated. However, even then I am wary. I notice that there are provisions for the duplication of the rail line. However, whether this calculates into a more frequent service—the actual thing that will rest the weary legs of workers standing up on this busy route—I cannot be certain.

Then we have the Tugun buck-pass—a project that has been promised and put back, promised and put back again, and now the government is saying that it will be done in 2009. If only we could believe the government when one considers its record on this issue. Moreover, the train that was promised to coincide with the road is now going to be delivered in 2026. This budget may very well have to be a 20 times as good a budget than any other because the government is claiming things in this budget that will not be delivered for 20 years. This could well be called the 2005-2026 budget.

Other notable exceptions from the budget included any money to upgrade mental health services on the Gold Coast. The mental health unit at the Gold Coast Hospital is chronically underfunded and is cracking under the strain of lack of resources. There have been three serious incidents in the last two months that have involved the release of patients from this unit and then not long after those patients threatened the lives of others or their own. One life was taken, one man was found hanging from a bridge on the M1 about to kill himself and another one ended up attacking an innocent bystander at a department store who was slashed in the throat, yet there is no saving grace from this budget. Despite the massive surplus, there is no relief for the Gold Coast Hospital and its psychiatric unit—none whatsoever—and it is a complete and utter disgrace and a shame and a slur on this government. In fact, the small amount allocated to mental health in the budget is representative of the continued underfunding of mental health in Queensland. There are two things mental health in Queensland needs—guidance and buckets of money, none of which is provided for in this apparently best budget ever.

On *60 Minutes* on Sunday night there was a story of a woman who was turned away from the PA Hospital after having slashed her wrists. A person with a known history of self-abuse was turned away—in fact, escorted from the PA Hospital grounds. This is not the way to treat mentally ill people, and they are being treated this way because there are not enough funds for mental health patients. One in four people

have to deal with a mental illness of some form and they are treated like second-class citizens by this government. The government has the budget surplus and the mandate: do something with it.

Moreover, this budget has a tendency to exclaim big numbers in the area of infrastructure, and yet delivery is poor and we end up spending more money than we have to. It is worrying that there are many instances where the government is prepared to pay top dollar for substandard services or is spending money in an inefficient way. This could be the reason why projects will take 20 years to complete and it could be the reason why the real essentials are not correctly provided for in this budget.

This links into a mentality of the government to announce things that look good in headlines. The Premier says, 'We will have X amount of doctors and X amount of wards.' 'We'll build this hospital and that hospital,' while wards in existing hospitals are not being used because there are no doctors to staff them. When faced with that question, the Premier says, 'I guess we'll have to find them from somewhere.' This is not good enough and it is dishonest to say things for a nice little political bounce without the intention or realistic expectation of following them through.

Yet on the other side of the coin the minister for public works and housing is proud that there will be removal of asbestos from roofs in schools within 10 years. When confronted with the question of doing it sooner, he says that the market of asbestos removalists is not big enough to do it sooner. Yet it is fine for the Premier to announce things that have not been realistically thought through like extra hospitals when there are already not enough doctors to fill the wards we have. This policy hopscotch is indicative of an arrogant and out-of-touch government.

Moreover, on the issue of schools, the government is not doing enough to keep schools in good shape. Minor works budgets are too small to look after the little things that happen around a school under the stress of hundreds of students. That is why some kids do not have soap and others do not have the safety of electrical safety switches in the classrooms or in public housing despite the government spending millions of dollars on advertising campaigns advocating their use to Mr and Mrs String Bag in their private homes. Again, it is because minor works do not get headlines. It is fine to build this and that and get a nice media bounce, but announcing 'We put soap in the school toilet block' is not front-page material. Perhaps the government should cater for the everyday workings of schools and not just the big-ticket items.

Although focusing on some big-ticket items would be nice, the government is not doing nearly enough in the area of water management and planning. There is a plethora of problems in the provision of water in south-east Queensland and none of them are being catered for. Of the \$2.3 billion set to be invested in water in the infrastructure plan, only \$861 million was actually announced. I certainly hope the other \$1.4 billion will be spent in the right areas. Perhaps one area could be desalination of water. Australia would be the best place geographically to use this established technology, and I am surprised that the idea has not received better airplay, particularly in Queensland. The government has missed the opportunity to secure Queensland's water for future generations.

But the greatest disappointment of the budget is the lack of tax reform. While we welcome the land tax reduction, more needs to be done and more questions need to be asked. Why did Premier Beattie make stamp duty on business conveyance the only inefficient tax that he did not cut under the intergovernmental agreement? Could it be that he receives about half a billion dollars from this form of tax every year? It adds substantially to the bottom line, does it not? This is a dead weight tax. If the government is serious about job creation, then this is the way to do it as of all the taxes it is a serious disincentive to business and business growth. Payroll tax is another.

I have stood in this place and told members of the lack of a level playing field as a direct result of payroll tax existing in its current form. It costs jobs and it costs businesses. It is an absolute disgrace that this tax has not been dropped to more acceptable levels. I know the Treasurer will say that at 4.75 per cent it is the lowest in Australia, but comparing himself to the other state Labor treasurers, who have been brought up in the same economically irresponsible environment as all Labor Party members, is a poor method of judging himself. Their tax rates are an incorrect yardstick on which to judge our Treasurer's performance.

The government take from payroll tax has increased by 37 per cent since 2002, yet members opposite—the purveyors of the politics of envy—say that the employers are rich; they can afford to pay it. This is a tax on jobs, so taking up the mantra of jobs, jobs, jobs, the Liberal Party has a plan to increase the threshold to \$1 million and lower the rate to four per cent.

I will conclude by saying to the Treasurer that he has done a reasonable job with this budget. However, he was a bit like a football team with all the stars that does not win the premiership. He had all the arsenal given to him by the federal government and the current economic climate, but he has not used it to full effect. I hear Labor members whingeing about the federal government being Satans incarnate, yet they do not seem to acknowledge that Queensland receives the lion's share of the GST pie and that that is a major reason for this budget being passable. I urge the Treasurer to provide benefits for the people of Queensland in ways that are efficient and that benefit the long-term future of the state and not just with a

mind to short-term headlines. If this is the minister's best effort, considering the needs that are out there in Queensland and the arsenal he has at his disposal to deal with those needs, then it is not good enough.

In the words of Winston Churchill: 'Sometimes it is not enough to do our best; we need to do what needs to be done.' It is clear what needs to be done: the Queensland Labor government needs to stop resting on its laurels and do it.