



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (9.16 pm): All crises have a lead time. When we saw the tragedy of the health crisis break on our news screens, when it started to be understood just what the tragedy of a failed health system meant in terms of personal cost, there were some people who said it was just about a bad doctor. It quickly became apparent as the Dr Patel scandal unravelled that it was not just about one bad apple but a system that was in distress—a system which had been allowed, under a Labor government, to bully people who spoke out about clinical standards and issues; a system which was failing to address the real issues facing Queenslanders.

I start on that note because it is relevant in the context of a budget which spends significant dollars on health. The government's only answer to the health crisis has been to throw money at it without reforming the very heart of the problems in this system. Still we see a system in which people are bullied.

Mr Terry Sullivan: That's rubbish. That's not true.

Miss SIMPSON: The member who interjects—as he always does and often very loudly during my speeches over the years—should know that the bullying that has gone on in Queensland Health has driven a lot of good-quality people out of the system. The tragedy is that as wages have increased to try to attract and retain staff that core issue has still not been addressed. Not until there is a new government in this state can we start to address the core issues and create workplaces where people want to work because they are not bullied by a system that penalises people who speak up about issues of quality. Until there is a new government in place we will see this situation where money is announced as the only answer to Queensland Health. That will not fix the problem.

I welcome funding for wages and for infrastructure in Health, but it makes one cry when one realises how many people have left the system. There are fewer visiting medical officers in many parts of regional Queensland than there were five years ago. That is despite a larger Health budget. The government will spend more money, but it has done nothing to address the nub of the problem which has seen this system decay. It will spend millions of dollars on advertising to tell the public that everything is better, but the public knows that it is not all better.

With the infrastructure situation in Queensland, in recent days we have seen a concentration on the issue of water. The National-Liberal coalition for many years has talked about the problem of this government not building water infrastructure. This issue did not resonate with or gain a lot of traction in the media until the taps started to run dry. Then the Beattie government, in the typical way that it responds to a crisis, came up with press releases and big statements. We saw this amazing announcement of the Traveston Crossing Dam and the Rathdowney or Tilley's Bridge Dam. The tragedy with this issue, like the health system, is that the government says that it will throw money at it, but it has failed to do the work to fix the nub of the problem.

Water infrastructure in Queensland is something that has been neglected by the Labor Party. Senior ministers of the Beattie government, including the minister who is now responsible for water, time and time again have denied the need for new water infrastructure in the form of dams in Queensland to the point—

Mr PALASZCZUK: I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I find those remarks untrue and offensive. I have let the House know on a number of occasions that I want to be remembered as the minister who built dams.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): Order! There is no point of order. The member for Maroochydore has the call.

Miss SIMPSON: This is the minister for no dams. This is the minister who has been in a government which for over eight years delivered no dams, delivered no new water infrastructure for south-east Queensland and in the past has spoken out against the need for a new dam in Queensland. The water situation in Queensland is so desperate that there are now Queenslanders facing the possibility of having recycled effluent tipped into their water supply and used as part of the potable water supply.

Mr PALASZCZUK: I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The honourable member is misleading the House. That is not government policy. However, it is opposition policy; it is in its water policy.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The member for Maroochydore has the call.

Miss SIMPSON: The minister is misleading the House. He should know that there is a referendum going on in Toowoomba. I am astounded that he would stand in this place and try to make out that this issue is not being faced by communities. It is being faced by Toowoomba. In fact, the member for Toowoomba North, I understand, has supported the yes case for the referendum in Toowoomba for recycled effluent going into the water supply there. Not only is he the minister for no water and no dams; he is the minister who has no idea in regard to what some of his own members have been advocating in this parliament.

All crises have a lead time. For this government to suddenly start blaming people coming over the border and climate change for the fact that we do not have any water in many parts of Queensland, particularly south-east Queensland, it must think that Queenslanders are idiots. I think its wake-up call is coming, because Queenslanders know that if you have been in government for eight years your fingerprints are over the water plans that have not been put out into the public arena. I think that your fingerprints are over the levers of government. The Beattie Labor government has to take the blame.

When we are on the brink of another election, this government comes up with a budget that promises to suddenly spend money on water infrastructure, but once again we need to look at the Beattie Labor government's track record. In the last budget \$694 million was not spent by this government on key capital works, despite this Labor government promising to spend those capital works—\$694 million. With this budget, again it is promising to spend a lot on infrastructure, but going on its track record most of this will not be spent.

It is somewhat telling that earlier in the week, when the shadow Treasurer asked the Treasurer a question about how many major projects had been delivered by the government in the last eight years, she could not answer.

Mr Terry Sullivan: Rubbish! That is untrue.

Miss SIMPSON: She got up to about four, and one of those that she included was, I think, The Strand. Although people would argue that it is a nice project, it is not what one would classify as a major capital works project for Queensland. The Premier was in such dire straits and he was so worried that his new Treasurer had mucked up at the first hurdle of answering a basic question about what major infrastructure his government had delivered that he put out a statement. He came in here with a wad of cobbled-together press releases. Within that cobbled-together bundle of press releases, a whole lot of the projects that were listed have not even been started.

It starts to list again the Tugun bypass. It starts to list the Houghton Highway upgrade. It starts to list the Gateway Arterial upgrade. These will be lovely when they are completed, but they have not been completed. We also saw a list of the federally funded projects that have been carried out once again creeping onto this government's list. I think it is quite telling that when I raised the issue of the government's lack of ability to roll out its infrastructure program—this was before we saw that \$694 million was not spent in the capital budget last year—when I raised the issue of needing to restructure the Coordinator-General's office to make sure that we did not have the Coordinator-General operating in a divided role between administering the Premier's department and the Coordinator-General's office, the Premier overreacted. He came into this place and personally attacked me. He said that I attacked a public servant who I had not attacked, and it was all about trying to protect the image of this government. It was about trying to put out an image that this government was building infrastructure. It would announce big dams, big roads and big projects but in reality—

Mr Johnson: Big holes.

Miss SIMPSON: Big holes. It is a hell of a big hole when \$694 million of infrastructure funding that was allocated in the last budget was not spent. It is a tragedy. What promises are there in this budget for actual dollars for water infrastructure? There are no dollars to start constructing any major water infrastructure, though we have a whole community—8,000 hectares in the Mary Valley and at Rathdowney—that is tied up while the government puts them through a belated investigation process. That apparently is this government's modus operandi. When there is a crisis, it puts out an announcement, has a big stunt and puts a lot of people into distress. We have seen it with water, we have seen it with our roads, we have seen it with our ports. With the port infrastructure, there has been a lack of investment over the last eight years that now sees congestion that is damaging the ability of a number of our industries to meet the demand that is there and available.

It has been mentioned by some of my colleagues before that it is an extraordinary time of incoming taxes to Queensland, particularly the \$7.9 billion of GST that is coming into Queensland and the record state taxes that are coming into Queensland. It is really a time of lost opportunity. We have a government that does not understand all crises have a lead time. Now that there is a need for this infrastructure and we are at a critical impasse the government is finding that there is not an ability to roll it out because it has lost that senior engineering ability in government—senior project experience to deliver on these projects.

Mr Johnson: They got rid of all the experienced people.

Miss SIMPSON: That is right.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Miss SIMPSON: I take that interjection. That is what happened in the health department. We have seen all those experienced people leave. In some cases they have left decades before they intended to leave. They take their expertise out of the public system. That is also reflected in other departments such as the Department of Main Roads.

Mr Malone interjected.

Miss SIMPSON: Senior dam specialists within DNRMW have left. People who had decades of experience are no longer in the Public Service. As this government talks about building infrastructure and turns to its public servants to see who has the expertise, they find that a lot of them have left. When this government suddenly decided that infrastructure is the go and it had to start rolling it out, it found it did not have the senior project capacity within government. That is why we have said that as a starting point with infrastructure it needs to focus on the highest levels of government.

The Premier's approach to this point has really been cartoonish. He has announced new dam infrastructure when no environmental studies have been carried out and no drilling has been done. That is typical of the way this government has run most major engineering projects across Queensland. These things should have been ready to roll. The preliminary investigations and advanced design work should have been ready to roll.

At a time of extraordinary GST revenue we have seen lost opportunities. This government is actually responsible for pushing up the price of projects because of the drought in the delivery of these projects over eight years. Let us talk about the amount of money that has come into Queensland. There has been \$7.9 billion in GST alone. That is an increase of 71 per cent on what Queensland initially received in GST revenue in the 2000-01 budget. At that time we were receiving \$4.6 billion in GST revenue. That was amazing because it was more than had been anticipated. Now it is \$7.9 billion. That is a \$3.3 billion increase in GST revenue. Believe me, we have not seen this government spend the same amount on critical infrastructure.

Our other state taxes have also increased at an extraordinary rate. The average Queensland family will pay \$7,871 in state taxes this year. That is much more than the \$4,658 they were paying in state taxes in the last year of the coalition government in Queensland. There has been a 70 per cent increase in state taxes, and inflation has not been running at that rate. This Labor government has never had it so good as far as the money coming in is concerned and yet it has left the train wreck of a lack of infrastructure.

This government broke the child safety system under Anna Bligh. She then went on to Education and made a mess there. She left behind numeracy and literacy problems for our children and she failed to address the issue of asbestos in schools. She then moved on to her next target. She is now the Treasurer. History will show that the child safety system was broken under Anna Bligh, who is now the socialist left Treasurer of Queensland.

Mrs Carryn Sullivan interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Male): Order! Member for Pumicestone, there is a member on her feet and I will hear her.

Miss SIMPSON: It does not matter how much money we give a Labor government, it will always misuse it. It could not run a chook raffle. Now we see a situation where the very person who destroyed the child safety system went on to another department and is now running Treasury.

If there was \$694 million unspent in the capital works budget last year, how much will be unspent this year? I see Labor members laughing about that figure. That is a warning sign. We are standing here on the brink of a disaster, with gridlock on our roads, a lack of water infrastructure—because nothing has been done under this Labor government—and our social infrastructure such as our hospitals grinding to a halt, and this Labor government still says that it deserves another go to wreak its form of government and maladministration on the people of Queensland for another term. Those opposite are really living in dreamtime.

An iconic example of a leftist government that has been given too much money is that we still see many critical projects that require funding—vital projects in communities that are of benefit—and yet this government announces another footbridge. The last time those opposite announced a proposal to build a footbridge in Brisbane the cost started out at \$13 million and then blew out to \$14 million.

This Labor government seems to know how to create major infrastructure projects: it starts with a small one and then blows the cost out. That is what we had with the last footbridge. The new footbridge is going to cost something like \$60 million and will join Peter Beattie's electorate to Anna Bligh's electorate. Once again it is quite an iconic symbol of a Labor government that does not mind taking everybody else's money, spending it on itself and telling those who are suffering without timely infrastructure to address the problems in their communities. They are virtually being told to eat cake while Labor wastes the money and fails to deliver on the priorities. Labor governments cannot manage a chook raffle, and the tragedy is that the people who pay the price are the children who fail to get adequate—

Time expired.