



Speech by

Hon. Robert Swarten

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard Thursday, 8 June 2006

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing) (4.50 pm): I seek leave to table a document to replace a document that I tabled and incorporated in *Hansard* this morning. I have discovered a typographical error in it and I wish to have that corrected.

Leave granted.

It gives me great pleasure to rise in support of the state budget. This Beattie government's responsible economic management during the last eight years has ensured that this state budget maintains Queensland's strong financial position while delivering record spending on infrastructure. This is a great budget and underscores our economic growth rate of 3.5 per cent higher than the national average for the 10th year running. Our unemployment rate is expected to remain around five per cent—a 30-year low—with employment expected to rise by about 55,000 people this year as a result of new job creation in construction, retail and mining.

This is a budget which delivers on health, education, law and order, and training. It is a budget with a strong social conscience underpinning the biggest infrastructure investment in history. I want to particularly point out that it is a budget for rich, poor and those in between. It delivers a record budget for people with disabilities of \$515 million—all state money—over 311 per cent more than the Nationals and Liberals left us eight years ago: the princely sum of \$125 million. This, I believe, is a measure of this government; that it cares about those who suffer disadvantage while still stoking the fires of the economy to bring about prosperity in the big end of town.

Honourable members will recall that last October the parliament sat in Rockhampton, and it gave all members of this House the opportunity to see firsthand what I have known for over 50 years—that Rockhampton is a great place to live, work and raise a family.

Employment: our unemployment rate of 8.3 per cent in Rockhampton for 15-to 24-year-olds and the general unemployment rate of 4.3 per cent show the effectiveness of solid, successive budgets from this Labor government over the past eight years and the willingness of our local businesses to rise to the challenge. When I became a minister in this government eight years ago, Rockhampton was a very different place. Our state infrastructure, which was just beginning to improve thanks to the Goss government, had languished under the Borbidge National-Liberal government. For example, our base hospital had its construction budget cut by \$6 million, a legacy which still exists today and is being addressed as part of the \$20 million expenditure on our new accident and emergency department.

Health gets \$9.7 billion. As we know, our health system is under constant attack from the negative, whingeing Nationals and their Liberal mates. Over 1,000 people every week get quality outcomes from our Rockhampton Base Hospital. Just last week I inspected the new \$1.5 million CT machine—the first of its kind in Queensland—and saw firsthand this machine dealing with a local patient who had suffered a severe head injury. I want to place on record my thanks to the staff—all of them—from the doctors, nurses and allied health workers to the administration staff and all of the other workers who work diligently in providing a quality of care that I believe rivals anything available anywhere in the world. With this budget outlining future health funding of \$9.7 billion over the next five years, we as a government are ensuring that

health is properly funded. Our doctors and nurses now receive salaries comparable with other states, which is the way it should be. I want to particularly congratulate the health minister on that.

There will always be challenges as our hospital is a huge concern, with some 2,000 employees and spending nearly \$3 million each and every day. However, our main challenge is to attract specialists. I believe the increased salaries and our great natural attractions and lifestyle attributes will provide incentives to lure these specialists. Of course it would help if the Howard government would train more doctors. We as a government are doing our best but it is high time the Nationals and Liberals stopped excusing the way in which the Howard government has failed to train doctors.

Schools get \$1 billion. Eight years ago our state schools were down at heel, especially our high schools, and I challenge anyone to say that now about them. Millions of dollars have been spent on upgrading our high schools in particular, but there is more on the way. An extra billion dollars has been announced in the budget to go into our schools. This is for all schools to bring them into the 21st century. This is the biggest boost ever. I well remember what the National Party did with Rockhampton schools, and I am delighted to have been involved in overcoming that neglect.

I must also point out that our teachers are now amongst the highest paid in Australia—as they should be—which sharply contrasts with eight years ago when they lagged long behind the other states. All in all, Labor has lifted education spending by \$4.08 billion since 1998—a whopping 70 per cent increase. I am aware from my mate Brendan Cook of the Queensland Teachers Union that there is ongoing concern that a positive learning centre has not appeared in this budget. I have raised this issue with the education minister, who is currently reviewing all behaviour management programs in Queensland so that we get the best model possible to deal with unruly and disruptive students. I will continue to make this issue one of my priorities. I thank Brendan and all the teachers in my electorate for the excellent job that they continue to do on behalf of the kids of this electorate.

Police: eight years ago, police had the worst facilities in this state. The North Rockhampton Police Station was a converted house and the city station was a rabbit warren. Today our hardworking police, who have an excellent record of success in tackling crime, have some of the best facilities in the state, and we will share in the 350 new police that this year's record \$1.3 billion Police budget brings.

I must also report on the progress of a couple of projects for which I personally lobbied. The showgrounds redevelopment into which we poured \$8 million has been a terrific success, with this year's Beef Expo, which we also sponsored to the tune of \$505,000, the best ever. Special thanks must go to Geoff Murphy and his team, as this event brought millions of dollars to our city and hundreds of international visitors.

The second project, the riverbank redevelopment, for which I secured \$9.5 million, is well underway and will deliver our mighty Fitzroy River back to the people. Extensive surveys showed that Rocky people wanted amenities, walking tracks and other vantage points so that the river could be more accessible, and this project will deliver that.

Skills training: last week I met with trade apprentices at Rockhampton TAFE, and I note the \$1 billion skills blueprint in this budget. If ever there was a time to train, it is now. I am pleased to see that 960 additional trade apprentices and 840 more certificate IV training places will be created in this area by 2010. I might also point out that, as the minister for Q-Build—the minister for public works—I have trained over 1,000 apprentices in Queensland since I became minister. No government, no minister anywhere in Australia, or probably in the world, has done that in the last eight years.

Housing: since becoming minister I have delivered \$57 million in community housing in the electorate of Rockhampton. This year a further \$14 million will be injected into housing in the central Queensland area. The fact is that the federal government and the Queensland Nationals and Liberals stand condemned for their attitude to public housing. Not only do the Queensland Liberals and Nationals have no policy on public housing; they remain silent on the fact that in rural and regional Queensland increasingly the private rental market, which the federal government funds by rent assistance, is collapsing.

In view of the time, I seek leave to incorporate in *Hansard* a list of the latest announcements in this year's budget which will further reinforce that the electorate of Rockhampton is very much on this government's agenda.

Leave granted.

STATE BUDGET 06-07—Rockhampton Budget Initiatives

Health

- \$5 Million to begin the refurbishment and expansion of the Rockhampton Emergency Department and relocation of medical records, mortuary, information services and the rural health training unit at a total cost of \$20.5 Million
- \$5.53 Million development of a new oral health building at Rockhampton Hospital with a total cost of \$7.15 Million

- \$1 Million to begin the provision of new staff accommodation at Rockhampton with a total cost of \$6.5 Million
- \$100,000 to continue relocating the mental health service for children and young people to the Rockhampton Hospital Campus with a total cost of \$1.65 Million

In addition, Rockhampton will share in health funding for Central Queensland including:

- \$3.22 Million for the Pilot Indigenous Alcohol Diversion Program in the Rockhampton Health Service District which will offer eligible offenders the opportunity to undertake alcohol and drug treatment prior to being sentenced in court
- \$2.03 Million in additional funding for the Rockhampton Health Service District to target health system pressure points and to provide immediate relief to health service areas
- \$327,000 for enhanced cardiac services in the Rockhampton Health Service District, including employment of an additional cardiologist, a nurse and a sonographer
- \$398,000 to support community mental health services in the Rockhampton Health Service District through the employment of additional specialist mental health staff
- \$184,000 in additional funding for Indigenous health programs in the Rockhampton Health Service District including nutrition and alcohol and drug workers
- \$700,000 for new cancer services in Rockhampton Health Service District from a statewide commitment of \$63.8 Million for the treatment and care of cancer patients across the state
- \$600,000 to place 20 self care dialysis units in sites around the State, including Rockhampton, to progress models of care which accommodate renal dialysis as close as practical to where a patient lives

Education and Training

- \$119,000 to Berserker Street State School to continue upgrading special education facilities with a total cost of \$445,000
- \$105,000 for targeted maintenance of buildings at Crescent Lagoon State School, Rockhampton North Special School and The Hall State School, external surfaces at Rockhampton Special School and the swimming pool at Glenmore State High School
- \$71,000 through the Triple R Maintenance Program for repainting at Crescent Lagoon State School and The Hall State School and roofing at Glenmore State High School
- \$44,000 for high priority maintenance related to classrooms at North Rockhampton State High School and Park Avenue State School and tuckshops at Crescent Lagoon State School and The Hall State School
- \$9,000 to Park Avenue State School towards continuing to air condition classrooms under the Cooler Schools program with a total cost of \$17,000

Rockhampton will also share in:

- \$6.1 million in recurrent funding to create an estimated 960 jobs through the Government's Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative throughout 06/07
- \$47.3 million in 06/07 for more than 2.9 million hours of vocational education and training in the Greater Brisbane Region.

Transport and Main Roads

- \$1.95 million for intersection improvements between Macaree Street and Richmond Street, on Rockhampton—Yeppoon Road
- \$520,000 to complete the installation of two sets of traffic signals on Fitzroy Street at the intersections with Campbell Street and Kent Street, at a total cost of \$650,000
- \$100,000 to complete intersection improvements at Musgrave Street and High Street, at a total cost of \$200,000
- \$80,000 to construct a bridge on Fairybower Road, Scrubby Creek in Rockhampton and Fitzroy Shires
- \$50,000 to complete upgrading Moores Creek Road to four lanes in Rockhampton, with a total State Government contribution of \$276,000

New Infrastructure Projects

- \$5.5 million to complete the \$9.5 million Rockhampton Riverbank Redevelopment
- \$1.6 million to continue construction of a new electricity substation on Berserker Street to reinforce supply to North Rockhampton with a total cost of \$12 million
- \$245,000 for the Browne Park Stadium Upgrade

Emergency Services

- \$1 million as part of a \$5.1 million commitment to boost community based helicopter providers
- Rockhampton will benefit with four new paramedics in Fitzroy and Mackay/Whitsunday area as part of a commitment to recruit 240 extra paramedics across the state for \$35.9 million

Police and Corrective Services

- \$78,000 in continued funding for the Rockhampton based Tactical Crime Squad
- \$13,000 in continued funding for LiveScan fingerprinting technology at the Rockhampton Watch house

Housing

- \$1 million to start construction on 22 new singles units in Allentown and four detached houses
- \$900,000 to complete construction of a further four dwellings
- \$555,000 towards construction of a new youth shelter
- \$870,000 for the local Home Assist Secure and Home and Community Care Modifications program
- \$108,000 in funding for Anglicare Central Queensland Limited under the Community Rent Scheme

Communities

- \$4.13 million to support people with disabilities and their families
- \$979,000 for the new Rockhampton Regional Service Centre for the Department of Communities
- \$476,000 to continue to provide foster care to 95-104 children/young people with moderate to high support needs through the Department of Child Safety
- \$445,000 to complete the fitout of the Central Queensland Child Safety zonal office located at Rockhampton
- \$400,000 to provide intensive levels of foster care within a carer's own home to 5 children/young people with mainly complex and in 1 case extreme support needs
- \$248,000 to continue to provide supported independent living services for 6 young people aged 15-17 years
- \$219,000 to continue to provide foster care to children/young people with moderate to high support needs
- \$201,000 to the Capricorn Tourism and Development region
- \$130,000 to the Central Queensland Consumers Association to continue providing a tenant advocacy and advice service

Sport and Recreation

- \$72,000 to be shared by local sport and recreation clubs
- A \$51,054 minor sporting facilities grant to the Victoria Park Bowls Club for the installation of a retractable shade structure over one bowling green at Victoria Park
- A \$15,113 minor sporting facilities grant to the Rockhampton Cycling Club for the construction of a covered warm up facility including a storage room for cycling at the Kenrick Tucker Velodrome

Mr SCHWARTEN: Time does not permit me to tell the full story of the last eight years or all of the wonderful aspects of this budget. Suffice to say, it is a building budget, a budget for the future and one which serves Rockhampton well. I am indeed privileged to serve the people of Rockhampton. It is my birthplace, as it was for two previous generations, and the place to which my forebears emigrated in the 1870s and 1880s. It is a city which continues to provide wealth, security and stability.

Today Rockhampton is very much on the move. The Macarthur coke plant, which is to start later this year, will again provide an impetus to our economy. I came into parliament to make a difference and to get a fair share of the dollars and services out of the state government. I believe any honest assessment of my performance would record that I have achieved that. I commend the budget to the House.

Tabled paper: Replacement document, dated June 2006, titled 'Department of Public Works Major Construction Projects'.