



Speech by

Jann Stuckey

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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CLEAN COAL TECHNOLOGY SPECIAL AGREEMENT BILL; APPROPRIATION BILLS

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—Lib) (5.09 pm): I stand here in this House privileged to represent the people of the Currumbin electorate—one that I have told members on numerous occasions is the most breathtakingly beautiful electorate in the whole of Queensland. Twelve months ago when I was giving my budget reply to this House I likened the Treasurer's effort to the movie *The Truman Show* and warned of a rosy facade that covered up the unfortunate truth. I am sorry to say that my predictions have become a reality with record borrowings required by this government to rescue the state from running out of water. Owing to years of poor planning, Queenslanders will be fleeced with the government paying premium prices as a result of its slovenly attitude over the past nine years.

On the other hand, the Howard-Costello team are sound economic managers, delivering two million more jobs and clearing the \$96 billion debt on which we paid over \$8 billion per year in interest under Labor. Our interest rates are lower than when Costello took charge of the economy and prosperity has never been better. On Wednesday this week it was announced that the Australian economy is at its strongest in four years.

The Premier and the Treasurer are pompous enough to take full credit for the prosperity that booming real estate markets, strong employment growth and a thriving mining sector have bestowed upon the fair folk of Queensland. If the truth be known, it is more a case of lady luck shining upon us than any management prowess of these two economic pirates.

I would like to draw the attention of the House to a few salient features of this year's state budget. It is projected that in 2010-11 the debt for which this government is responsible would have reached \$51,725 million compared to the 2006-07 budget estimate of \$21,748 million. Over that period interest costs will total almost \$10,000 million, or 20 per cent of the 2010-11 borrowings. Government owned corporations mainly will have a debt burden of \$32,383 million. On assets of \$63,466 million in 2010-11, they will show a positive operating balance of \$139 million. It is noted that in that year 16 per cent of their revenue will come from state government grants. In just four years, interest expense will consume over six per cent of revenue compared to the 2006-07 budget of three per cent.

This government is starting to show the same appetite for debt that we saw in the Cain and Kirner Labor governments in Victoria and the Keating Labor government in Canberra. If this government persists, its reckless and imprudent policies will place enormous burdens on taxpayers and on continued investment in the state's future for generations to come.

At a minimum, the government must immediately rein in its employee expenses, which have risen by over \$1 billion in a year. Before anyone attempts to defend this outrageous example of irresponsibility by arguing that that increase was due to the employment of extra ambulance workers, police officers, doctors, nurses et cetera, the budget papers reveal that only 1,800 additional staff of these classifications were to be hired, costing no more than \$200 million.

Historically, this government has a track record of squandering opportunities due to its abysmal economic management skills which saw it selling off assets to pay for basic services that are not a privilege but the right of every Queenslander. After sitting on their hands for years and watching the state suffer through drought, these irresponsible leaders recently discovered, as panic buttons continued to be hit, that they will need to fund a water grid, the cost of which has blown out from \$6.5 billion to \$9 billion or more. Mind you, this is no surprise when we look at the saga of the Tugun bypass. A decade ago costs were under \$55 million, but owing to this government's woeful negotiation skills with its New South Wales Labor counterpart—which, I might add, is still not contributing one cent towards the construction of the bypass—costs have exploded to \$543 million.

This government is rolling in money to the tune of around \$30 billion from taxes, grants and subsidies. Yet it is forcing more taxes on Queenslanders. For example, we hear that the tax on new and used cars is supposedly going to fund our sorely neglected mental health services. Although I welcome much-needed funding for mental health services, one would think that a government, which is supposedly so dedicated to climate change, would have allocated these moneys in an environmental direction.

I ask members to remember what happened to the ambulance levy that entitles all Queenslanders to utilise Queensland ambulance services, which some people are forced to pay several times. A total of \$440 million has been raised in taxes, yet the Ambulance Service is crumbling. For over two years paramedics and other Queensland Ambulance Service employees have been warning the minister and his department that the culture of bullying has caused such low morale that the numbers of qualified paramedics and officers was dropping and that in many instances equipment was past its use-by date. A large injection of funds in this budget is expected to be the panacea and cure-all for this much-bullied service. But unless the serious issue of morale is addressed and dedicated paramedics feel that they are valued, the service will continue to flail and suffer from resignations in numbers that outstrip new recruits.

Under this Labor government Queensland has lost the title of being the low tax state. Residents and businesses can expect whopping hikes to their electricity bills and water prices are predicted to go through the roof. Commerce Queensland is clearly disappointed, stating that this year it has received only budget crumbs. Our public health system has decayed to such a sorry state that even full limb amputations will not stop the disease from spreading. My genuine respect goes to the staff who survived the bullying and overwork to continue their professional duties. This crisis-ridden government is relying on the private sector to bail it out time and again to reduce waiting lists by performing public patient surgery. Most recently it moved the Robina palliative care unit to an unpopular location in Southport with only a week's notice. Alas, nothing has changed internally as the culture is still all about bureaucratic number crunching with compassion and staff consultation a very low priority. Money alone cannot change culture and despite a promise of \$7.15 billion in this year's budget, unless health professionals are treated with some admiration and valued for the significant contributions they make, the crisis will not abate.

A shortage of 600 beds on the Gold Coast indicates that patients will still have to wait unacceptable times for medical attention. There should be 2.4 beds per 1,000 people, which means that the Gold Coast should have at least 1,200 beds. Doctor recruitment has gone backwards. In 2004 there were 1,220. In 2005 there were 1,144. In 2006 there were 1,162. That does not include the 2,500 doctors who have left the public system over the past few years owing to poor pay and bullying by this Labor government.

I now move to my shadow portfolios of child safety, disability and mental health policy. We continue to hear from the government that it is spending record amounts as if it deserves a pat on the back for its efforts. As I have said, all Queenslanders deserve basic health, transport, education and community services. It is obvious that, with a growing population, there would be pressures placed on systems. You do not need to be Einstein to work that out. For this government to prance about as if it is doing Queenslanders a favour when it is the people's money it is spending shows just how arrogant and puffed it has become.

Before commenting on the budget for Child Safety, I would like to take a moment to thank the minister for inviting me to a budget briefing yesterday. May I also express my gratitude to staff in the minister's office for their helpful manner. Of all government departments, Child Safety is responsible for looking after the welfare of society's most vulnerable, our children. Complex needs accompany children who have suffered severe violent sexual and emotional harm at the hands of their perpetrators. It takes staff with specialised training and innate skills to make decisions that affect these precious charges.

This portfolio carries a half billion dollar budget investment which, whilst highly commendable, will do little to reduce the alarming rate of child abuse notifications and the number of children in care until the department adopts a more therapeutic rather than a heavy-handed investigative approach. Stakeholders tell me that the government must change its focus and do more preventive work because, according to some sources, up to 50 per cent of children come into care due to neglect. Neglect needs to be recognised as a systemic issue, such as homelessness or poor parenting skills, where help and education could play an important role in improving the wellness of the notified child.

A spokesperson for QCOSS has further criticised the budget for not having any plan to tackle poverty in Queensland. Despite much brouhaha about the importance of early intervention and prevention, there is no increase in this budget. Early intervention, coupled with prevention through education, is the basis of the new Ditto program that has been devised by Bravehearts. Thanks to a grant last year from the child safety and communities departments, this program is being delivered in schools.

An article in the *Courier-Mail* yesterday stating that child abuse reports were expected to rise is seen by some as an admission of failure by this department to effectively understand and deal with the problem. The minister has acknowledged the fact that funding for Indigenous children is disproportionately represented and is further aggravated by big distances between communities in far-north Queensland which necessitates better services and housing for staff. There has long been suspicion in Indigenous communities of government intervention in their communities. This budget is seeking to work towards keeping Indigenous children who are identified as being at risk in close connection with their culture through the new residential care facilities, the first placement house on Palm Island and establishing employee housing and facilities within these communities. Since the establishment of this department the Beattie government has been insistent on throwing more and more dollars at more layers of bureaucratic services when these could be handled effectively by utilising more services from NGOs.

After years of battling this government and the findings of the Forde report eight years ago, the announcement of a \$100 million one-off redress scheme for children abused in Queensland institutions was received with a certain degree of elation. A number of victims have publicly stated the fact that the outcome is marred by the length of time it took the government to accept responsibility for making sure compensation was paid.

In the area of disabilities, stakeholders are expressing their enormous disappointment over this budget, feeling that they have been overlooked with increased funding going to infrastructure rather than services. It is all very well for the Treasurer to boast of bigger spending than ever before and increasing spending in this sector by 222 per cent over nine previous budgets, but Queensland's spending on support for people with a disability per capita of the potential population remains lower than any other state or territory.

There is no substantial funding for community based services to address unmet need in Queensland. While there has been an increase in indexation, it falls well short of matching the rising costs of delivering services in Queensland. Excuses from the Premier and Treasurer that Queensland's rapid growth is the cause of unmet need is both a dispassionate and lame one. As the population grows so does the need for disability services. Like many members in this House I have heard countless legitimate stories of people with disabilities and their families who cannot access any care packages or respite. Funding must be invested primarily in the people the department is responsible for helping, not just programs, bricks and mortar. More money is being spent but it is not equating into services. NGOs are losing their character as compliance mechanisms become more restrictive and prevent disabled people from taking part in activities.

Disability organisations that are well used to making every funding dollar stretch as far as is humanly possible are genuinely worried that they will no longer be able to meet the disability support needs in their respective communities. The big issue is why in this prosperous state of ours is the gap growing in unmet need and what will the long-term social and economic costs be to this state if we fail to meet these needs adequately?

Mental health has finally been given some recognition with a half a billion dollar boost to funding in this budget, together with an acknowledgement that it was an area neglected by the Labor government. I note the Premier's comments in a media release dated 30 May where he stated, 'The most important issue for those with a mental illness is for them to be able to get help when they need it.' I could not agree more. Yet under the Premier's leadership, years of chronic underfunding and a failure to recognise the escalation of the problem has seen Queensland lag behind other states despite numerous reviews and inquiries.

An additional 140 mental health beds for the whole of Queensland is nowhere near enough for our current population let alone future growth. It is not stated in the budget where these beds will be located. The Gold Coast alone needs 40 acute adult psychiatric beds right now to bring us into line with the recommended provision of beds per population. Other regions are in similar situations with existing services and staff stretched beyond what many would consider reasonable boundaries. Emergency departments will continue to overflow with an increase in demand for mental health beds and the situation is not helped by an increase in medical and surgical beds. Apart from a shortage of acute mental health beds, there is an urgent need for extra beds for older age psychiatric patients, drug and alcohol detoxification plus forensic psychiatry units. Supported accommodation for chronically ill patients that is staffed 24 hours and has rehabilitation and recovery services inbuilt is also crucial if we are to supply help when it is needed, as identified by the Premier.

I note the \$10 million per year for four years for the Department of Housing to build or purchase specially designed accommodation for people with a mental illness, together with a further \$22.4 million

also over four years to provide a range of social support services to people living in the new accommodation. However, when one considers the scope of this problem, \$10 million does not equate to a large number of residences across Queensland. Establishment of a statewide victim support centre and additional forensic mental health staff as per recommendations in Brendan Butler's review of the Mental Health Act 2000 are welcome budget items.

The Currumbin electorate has secured funding for big-ticket items such as the ongoing construction of the Tugun bypass, which is being built with both state and federal monies, and infrastructure for the billion-dollar Tugun desalination plant which is a partnership between the state government and Gold Coast City Council. There were also a number of smaller allocations. These include \$400,000 for the widening of the Tallebudgera Connection Road to help ease increased traffic in our suburbs; \$200,000 for improvements at the Tomewin Street and Gold Coast Highway intersection near the entrance to Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary; \$22.5 million for high-voltage feeders from Currumbin to Burleigh Heads to supply power to the desalination plant; \$5.73 million for the Currumbin substation upgrade; and \$4.35 million for underground cables to supply power to the desalination plant. Sadly there was no funding for the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary which continually has to play second cousin when it comes to funding as it receives absolutely nothing from the state government. Fleay's Wildlife Park at Burleigh, however, received \$250,000 for redevelopment, which seems unfair. Funding is desperately needed for a new wildlife hospital to cater for the 4,000 plus injured native animals brought in for care each year.

I heartily congratulate the sanctuary on the initial success of its koala exchange program and recent birth of twin koalas to Murrumbidgee in the world-class Xiangjiang Safari Park in Guangzhou, China. Michelle Monsour and her team are to be praised for the way they have managed this very delicate transfer of our beloved koalas to another country. With loving care from their Australian handler, the koalas all appear to be thriving and millions of Chinese are suffering from koala mania such is the joy our furry fauna bring.

HOST—Homelessness Outreach Support Team—funding of \$600,000 was announced last year to provide help to those who sleep rough and cannot access crisis accommodation. Spread out over three years and covering a region from Beenleigh to Coolangatta, this funding is to be used to provide assistance to people with complex needs who experience difficulty accessing the crisis accommodation that is dearly needed. Liz Fritz of the Uniting Church's Blair Athol crisis accommodation facility brought together a consortium of like-minded agencies to bring about this innovative project which was successful in receiving funding.

Affordable housing has been affected by an increase in the number of households and an undersupply of affordable housing. I applaud the funding from the minister for more public housing as the waiting time in my electorate is eight to 10 years. I just paid the minister a compliment and I hope that he will take it.

Tugun's desalination plant is expected to be finished in November 2008 at an estimated cost of \$1.12 billion. As I look back over my budget reply from last year, I see this project was merely an investigation with a \$14 million investment by the state government. Current spending is about \$70-80 million per month and around 25 per cent of the total project has been completed. Work is about to start on the tunnels and construction of the main water distribution pipeline from Tugun to Worongary started last Friday. Staff who will be working on the offshore barge are undergoing helicopter crash training as part of their safety preparation. This is not for the faint-hearted, I am told on good authority.

It is worth remembering that the people of the southern Gold Coast had to wait 20 years for the Tugun bypass and almost ended up with a road going east of the airport and the resumption of homes. The good news is that this motorway from Currumbin to Tweed Heads is well on schedule. I take this opportunity to commend Main Roads and everyone involved with this long-awaited project.

Talk of quality transport corridors flows freely from the transport minister's lips. At Coolangatta we are literally the end of the line and will have to wait more than a decade to see a rail service. Several million people fly into the Gold Coast airport each year with the newly opened runway extension. This government is always bragging about the value of our tourism industry, but we will not be able to catch a train in Coolangatta until 2018. Suburban Elanora further north will not see trains until at least 2011-12.

The memorandum of understanding between the Premiers of New South Wales and Queensland in February this year has seen common sense prevail with the establishment of dual taxi ranks to assist passengers who undertake cross-border taxi journeys.

I am pleased to report that concentrated policing efforts throughout the electorate have resulted in a reduction in crime, especially in Coolangatta, thanks to the directions of Inspector Des Lacy and Senior Sergeants Steve St George and Mark Johnston.

The Southern Alliance Task Force has contributed largely to the improvement in behaviour of some of our youth, although residents have recently started contacting my office with reports of troublesome

youth gatherings in Tugun. I congratulate Jim Keogh on his recent appointment as superintendent of the Gold Coast district. Jim lives in the Currumbin electorate and is very active in many community groups, having a big involvement in the local surf lifesaving movement.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the terrific achievements and contributions made by our community groups and volunteers such as Neighbourhood Watch, Lions, Rotary, Volunteer Marine Rescue, rural fire brigades and surf clubs to name a few.

In 2005 the Premier listened to huge public pressure from southern Gold Coast locals and promised to protect the site of the original primary school on Kirra Hill from residential development. Heritage listing was sought for the building which was in a poor state and the land was to be handed over to council by the state government. Here we are in 2007 and the government has stalled the Kirra Hill master plan. I urge the government to assist the Gold Coast City Council with this historic and nostalgic project by investing \$500,000 towards the restoration of the old school.

Many surfers believe our famous surfing break at Kirra to be a victim of the Tweed sand bypass project which has pumped millions of cubic metres of sand northwards. The Gold Coast City Council is negotiating with the state government to gain support for a feasibility study to examine the possibility of moving unwanted sand and I encourage the government to explore that.