



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

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CLEAN COAL TECHNOLOGY SPECIAL AGREEMENT BILL; APPROPRIATION BILLS

Ms STRUTHERS (Algester—ALP) (12.18 pm): There were two events this week that put a big smile on my face and I am sure on the faces of many people around Queensland. One of those was a natural occurrence—the amazing rainfall we witnessed—and the other a product of very careful planning and thought—the state budget. Low rainfall and climate change are the most urgent challenges facing Queensland and in particular my region of south-east Queensland. My guess is that the rainfall overshadowed the budget in the popularity stakes this week. But the 2007-08 state budget deserves to be in the public spotlight as it is a financial plan that sets us on a strong economic path while caring for many of the social needs that cause individuals and families great distress.

At the Brisbane Ekka as a kid I remember hearing the sales pitch from side-show alley: 'Every child wins a prize'. This budget makes a very substantial effort to provide something for everybody. Business will be delighted with the ever-growing investment in capital programs—\$14 billion worth of projects, the highest of all states and territories. Business will be delighted with the ever-increasing investment in education, skills and training. The world-class trade centre at Acacia Ridge, in my local electorate, with campuses statewide is a leader in its field. It is receiving a further \$33 million for stage 2 of its development.

Everyone—individuals, communities, industries—is feeling the impact of water shortages. The ongoing development of the water grid is central to this budget and to easing the anxiety many people in Queensland are feeling about the drought in south-east Queensland. I pay tribute to residents in my local area and the public generally for the part everybody has played in limiting water use. One in 10 people in south-east Queensland have installed a rainwater tank under the state government's rebate scheme and they will be happy this week that they have filled up.

Families around the state will also be relieved to hear of the record investment this government is making to improve our health system, including unprecedented increases to mental health services around the state. It was very pleasing to see this week the thumbs up from key health stakeholders such as Dr Christian Rowan from the Rural Doctors Association and the new president of the Queensland AMA, Dr Ross Cartmill.

Families will also be relieved to hear of the record investment to make housing more affordable and more available for low income people. Over \$500 million will be allocated to social housing, including the construction of more public housing. The Queensland economy is strong; employment is at a record high with the lowest unemployment levels in 30 years at four per cent. Many working people with decent jobs and sound investments are doing well, but young people must be thinking how they will ever afford to own their own house or even get a decent rental product in the current market. Housing affordability has not received the national attention and the action from the federal government that it so critically deserves. Did we see a commitment to put more people into secure and low-cost housing in the federal budget? No, we certainly did not. The federal government's response of rental assistance to individuals and homeowner

grants has inflated the housing market. House prices and rentals have spiralled upwards at a time when we need a national housing action plan and urgent construction of more affordable public housing units.

I commend the Deputy Premier and her colleagues in cabinet for tackling the housing issue head on with a massive injection of funds for new housing construction, land tax relief and determined efforts to ease the cost of new housing by taking greater control over local government development charges, land release and approval processes. We cannot wait for the federal government to come good on housing. We need a national affordable housing action plan but at the state level we are taking very responsible action now.

A similar story can be told in health. Health funding from the federal government ought to be on a 50/50 basis with the states. That is the formula that has traditionally been the basis of the Commonwealth-state health agreement. But not these days. Under the federal Howard government states like Queensland are putting in more like 60 per cent to the 40 per cent being coughed up by federal government.

In my daily work I hear of the tragic suffering of people living with mental illness and those caring for them. In fact, the reality seems to be that one in 10 people will suffer some form of mental illness, including depression, so no family remains untouched by this issue. With the rollout of over \$528 million over four years to improve hospital and community based mental health services, we will soon see more hospital beds for people with severe mental illness and more staff in community and government agencies available to support families in their own communities and homes. I commend the Queensland Alliance and the other mental health organisations for dedication to their work. They have called for this significant growth in funds and they will be very pleased with what they see in this budget.

Locally in my electorate I am very pleased to see additional money for local schools, including \$500,000 for the wonderful little Pallara State School. It is like a little country school in the city. Over \$1 million will be allocated the Forest Lake State School for the development of the oval at a total cost of \$1.5 million. The school community in Forest Lake has been very patient. This project has been on the drawing board for a couple of years but due to compulsory acquisitions and other matters it has been slow. They have been very patient but over the next few months we will see this project come to fruition.

This state budget is fiscally responsible. It does prepare us well for the challenges of water shortage and climate change. It is fair in offering hope to people living with the daily worry of housing stress, poor health or disability problems. It is an outstanding budget. It is a budget that balances economic and social priorities. It is a wonderful Labor budget.