



Speech by

# Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Thursday, 7 June 2007

---

## CLEAN COAL TECHNOLOGY SPECIAL AGREEMENT BILL; APPROPRIATION BILLS

**Mr MESSENGER** (Burnett—NPA) (4.43 pm): In rising to speak to this year's budget, I seek leave to table a press release that was issued by the Premier's office on Thursday, 17 August.

Leave granted.

*Tabled paper:* Press Release, dated 17 August 2006, issued by Premier, relating to increase of beds at Bundaberg Hospital, expansion of the emergency department and upgrade of rehabilitation services

It was this document that I was thinking of when the Treasurer handed down this year's budget. It states—

A re-elected Beattie government will begin work immediately to add 30 new beds at Bundaberg Hospital, expand the emergency department and upgrade current rehabilitation services by early 2008.

Premier Peter Beattie said the upgrading would cost \$41.4 million over four years to 2009/10 and would improve patient care and ensure the hospital is meeting current and future demand.

The plan includes:

A new 20-bed medical ward will be built in the redeveloped rehabilitation section of the hospital by early 2008 (\$24.2 million)

An upgraded emergency department with 6 new beds and six new assessment bays will be operating by early 2008 (11.1 million)

An upgraded rehabilitation ward with 4 new beds operating by early 2008 (5.7 million)

Further down the press release it states—

Construction will then begin to relocate the 16-bed rehabilitation unit to that vacated space. This will provide four extra 'general purpose' beds in addition to the current 16-rehab beds.

All in all, in August last year the Premier was promising by early 2008 30 new beds for the Bundaberg Base Hospital. Members could imagine my shock and, I would have to say, profound disappointment when I examined this year's Wide Bay-Burnett budget. Under the heading of 'Total estimated cost', there is \$41 million. Under the heading of 'Expenditure to 30.6.07', there was a zero—no dollars—and then the budget for 2007-08 was \$2.3 million. The Premier has not kept his promise. He has punished the people of Bundaberg and Burnett for revealing the truth about just how badly he and his government ran down our public health system.

I think it is ironic, that because of the disaster that occurred at the Bundaberg Base Hospital, health services all over Queensland have seen a 12 per cent increase but Bundaberg and the Burnett have hardly seen a cracker of that money. There will not be one extra bed available at the Bundaberg Base Hospital.

Right now, terminally ill patients are being kicked out of the public hospital because there is not one public palliative care bed in Bundaberg. Already, my office has been contacted by two families about this issue. Today I received library research on this matter. An estimate that I received from one doctor working in the area was that there are approximately 35 palliative care beds funded in public hospitals in Queensland. Of these, the majority are located in rural and regional areas. There is not one in Bundaberg. I was informed that in Brisbane, of the 900 beds at the Royal Brisbane Hospital, none are available for

palliative care. Of the 750 beds at the Princess Alexandra Hospital, none are available for palliative care. There are four palliative care beds at the Logan Hospital and the Mount Olivet Hospital has 18 public palliative care beds and 15 private beds.

This situation in Queensland where we have such a minimal amount of public space for palliative care patients has to be addressed by this government and it should be done so in very short order. People who require palliative care and their families should be looked after by a government that purports to look after the battlers.

The Premier has not kept his election promise to the people of Bundaberg and the Burnett. He promised \$41.4 million a year ago and 30 beds and did not spend one cent in the lead-up to the election. He had no intention of keeping his promise. This year he has promised to spend only \$2.3 million for an upgraded accident and emergency ward and zero beds. At this rate it will take 16 years for Peter Beattie to keep his promise and deliver the full \$41.4 million, or more.

Extra hospital beds were announced for hospitals at the Sunshine Coast and Cairns, but none in Bundaberg. I heard that extra beds were announced at the Redland Hospital. Good luck to them, but Bundaberg Base Hospital deserves more beds. There are 1,200 births in Bundaberg each year, reflecting the unprecedented growth in the region, and that is placing pressure on our public health system. The only private hospital in the area has stopped delivering babies. The public hospital now delivers an extra 350 babies each year on top of the 850 babies that used to be born each year at that hospital. We desperately need more beds and doctors and nurses to care for those extra patients. Excluding the mental health in-patient beds, Bundaberg Hospital has only 120 beds for surgical, medical, paediatrics et cetera to service a population of 120,000. That means that we have only one public hospital bed available for every 1,000 people. There was nothing for dental health in the budget—nothing to reduce the six-year waiting list. Bundaberg deserves the best public hospital system in Australia.

This budget shows that Peter Beattie has forgotten and does not care about what happened at our hospital. He has forgotten and does not care about the 87 deaths and the 2,000 people who were illegally dealt with by Queensland Health—that is, ex-Patel patients. He has forgotten and does not care that our children will still be mixed with adults in the paediatrics ward. This is incredible and shows just how desperate the hospital is for beds: children are being mixed with adults. There is no medium-term planning in this budget. This budget is not even a bandaid solution to our problem; it is a nod and a wink and a pat on the head.

Two years and two months after Patel fled to the US on 1 April 2005 on a Beattie government funded flight the victims of the worst health disaster and the people of Queensland have lost all hope of justice being delivered. No-one believes this Labor government has the will or the ability to properly manage the charging and extradition of Jayant Patel. I well remember the day that the Premier flew into town and promised the people of Bundaberg and Burnett that he would fix the Bundaberg Hospital. I welcomed him at the airport with a megaphone. I asked him two specific questions that were not given all that much publicity: 'Why did you fly Patel out of the country and why haven't you flown him back?'

At the time the Premier walked straight through the gates of the Bundaberg airport, and as I asked him those questions he was part of a dirty little secret. He was only one of a handful of people in Queensland at that time who knew that Patel had just been made an offer to come back and face trial in Queensland. Even though the DPP had recommended that it was a good deal, the Premier's Attorney-General at the time rejected that advice without even consulting Patel victims. So one can imagine what the Premier was thinking when I asked him: 'Why haven't you flown Patel back? You flew him over there in the first place.'

No wonder the Premier did not come back to Bundaberg again in the whole of the election campaign. He did not show up at all. It was a marginal seat and he did not show up to support his candidate one little bit. I think he got scared. Imagine if that information had become public during the election campaign and we did not have to rely on the media to expose the truth after the election. How would the people of Queensland who demand a fair go and justice have voted if they knew of that scandalous cover-up? We would have had a very different budget being handed down for the people of Bundaberg and Burnett.

Today, the Attorney-General made some statements regarding the mediation and compensation process. It is up to the government to explain why almost one in five claims for compensation for former Patel victims have been knocked back. The government has to prove that they were not victims rather than the other way around. How can the Attorney-General say that 66 people do not deserve compensation? From the moment that this supposed doctor touched them it was assault.

This health department allowed a fraud—an unregistered, incompetent person—to experiment on at least 2,000 people at the Bundaberg Hospital in two years. There is still plenty of evidence in two royal commissions and one novel that Patel did not honestly fill out medical records. Did the Attorney-General rely on Queensland Health records to determine victim eligibility, because if he did then does he not realise

that they could be false or fraudulent for two important reasons? One, Patel lied when he altered and falsely filled out medical records—we all know that.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Darling): Order! Member for Burnett, just be careful of anything that is before the courts. Keep it to the compensation side of things.

**Mr MESSENGER:** Thank you for your direction. Two, Queensland Health bureaucrats covered up, lied and altered medical records. There needs to be an independent judicial review of the mediation and compensation process. Each Patel victim should be given an immediate payment of \$10,000 and then the mediation process could have decided, or should decide, if and how much extra compensation payment should be made. It is time to come clean and tell us how many compensation payments have been made to victims. The Attorney-General did not say that today. The government should not cover up the total amount. I want to be able to work out how much the average payment to each victim has been. What has the government got to be ashamed of? The last public figure that we could calculate showed that each victim was getting on average around \$21,000. It must be remembered that this person was operating illegally from the first second he arrived at Bundaberg Hospital.

In the budget there is a category of expenditure called infrastructure. This is a new category for the budget papers. They say that within the Wide Bay-Burnett statistical area \$270,850,000 is going to be spent. That is a large amount of money. I assume that the money is going to be spent on the Traveston Crossing Dam. The government plans to complete a draft environmental impact statement by the end of 2007-08. This is crazy stuff. If this government were fair dinkum about completing this project by the end of 2011, this would have been carried out by now. Even though we are in the worst drought ever, if a conservative government had been in power for the last nine years we would have had enough water. Conservative governments would have built dams and made sure that we had enough water and basic infrastructure to provide for those 1,500 people moving to the state each week.

Elaborating on that point, I want to tell members about a trip that I made to Fred Haigh Dam, which is north of Bundaberg just outside the Burnett region. It supplies the majority of our water for the irrigation scheme. I did not realise who Fred Haigh was. On a plaque overlooking Lake Monduran, Fred Haigh Dam, it said, 'Fred Haigh—Water Commissioner 1955 to 1974.' So for 19 years this very loyal civil servant was in charge of building dams. There were 12 major pieces of water infrastructure built between 1955 and 1974. In 19 years, 12 dams were built. Fast forward to 1989 when the Goss Labor government came in and then add 19 years and that brings us up to next year, 2008. How many major pieces of water infrastructure have been built in that 19-year period, when 17 of those years were under Labor rule? I will tell members. One—one dam, the Paradise Dam, which was built out the back of Burnett. In order to get that dam we had to drag this government kicking and screaming the whole way. That shows the absolute lack of planning by any Labor regime. Labor cannot plan to build for infrastructure for the people of Queensland. It has absolutely been proven beyond doubt.

We would not have worried about the few trees that would have been drowned so that Brisbane and the south-east corner could have been drought proofed. We could have put up with the screams from the trees as the life-giving water filled the new dams at Wolffdene, Wyaralong, Glendower and Amamoor Creek and the raising of Borumba Dam.

In the time I have left I will briefly speak to the Police and Corrective Services budget. There has been no mention of funding towards a new police academy in this year's budget—200 new police is a reduction in numbers from last year's budget of 350. Labor was singing its praises, 'Hallelujah, we have 200 extra police.' That is 200 new police—that is, 150 fewer police than last year—being trained. From 1 July 2006 to 1 March 2007, there were 181 separations.

If we take this figure into 2007-08, we will see a net loss in police numbers. No wonder when people ring 000 police are slow to respond. It is because we do not have any front-line police. There are police stations out there that will not be manned. There will be one-person patrols. The QPRIME stage 2 rollout has been given no extra money for extra training and a major complaint of police is that they are not getting enough training. QPRIME is the new computer reporting system for police. It has caused major problems and difficulties. Front-line police are being reassigned to computer jobs so that they can sort out the problems of QPRIME. Two police took seven hours to enter the details of one road accident. That is how many problems there are with this computer system.

The Fortitude Valley station announcement is nothing new, with the Beattie Labor government setting aside \$8 million to upgrade the station two years ago, although nothing happened and the project cost has now blown out to \$13 million. The money for the Caboolture and Coomera projects is simply money that was not spent last year that has been rolled over, while the \$1.3 million for the new police station at Wujil Wujil was also announced last year, albeit at a cost that was \$100,000 lower.

In addition, the minister promised \$3.1 million for a new police station at Sippy Downs last year, but nothing happened. This year there is only \$1.6 million to design and plan for the Sippy Downs station. Would it not have made more sense to design and plan first? Overall capital works expenditure was underspent in 2006-07 by \$42,027,000. This has been rolled over. Land acquisitions in 2006-07 blew out

by almost \$6 million and only \$1,100,000 has been allocated for 2007-08. Despite continued calls for watch-house upgrades around the state, this government has slashed the watch-house upgrade budget to \$500,000 for the whole state.

There is no extra money whatsoever set aside for pay rises for police and Corrective Service officers. We have an exodus of police from the Queensland Police Service. They are leaving hand over fist because their pay and conditions are deteriorating when compared with the rest of the states. They are being poached. Eight SERD officers resigned en masse. Just like that they are gone. Another eight are on standby. Corrective Services are not in all that much better a position. In Corrective Services we have jails that are awash with drugs. The minister does not know what is happening in her jails. She does not know how much water is being used for her prisoners. Prisoners are hooked on drugs. People are going in clean and coming out with a habit and hemp seed. Despite the expected growth in community corrections into 2007-08 the government has only increased community supervision service staff by two. There is no mention of increased pay for Corrective Services staff. A measly \$1.86 million increase has been allocated for 2007-08 to manage dangerous sexual offenders in the community. There is money for a monitoring program that has been thrown out by the courts. There is no mention of budget increases for prisoner rehabilitation programs—the list goes on and on.

Time expired.