



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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APPROPRIATION BILLS; REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (3.00 pm): I rise to deliver my speech in reply to the 2008-09 budget. I would like to thank the Treasurer in advance for the moneys allocated to the Nanango electorate. I recognise that there is never enough money to go around and the old saying is that you cannot please everyone. But like everyone else in this chamber I will be holding my begging bowl out for a lot, lot more.

I could not help but notice to a certain extent that this budget is primarily a south-east corner budget, and there will be many in the House who will ensure that the government is fully informed of the vastness of the state when it comes to disbursement of funds. It is my responsibility, however, to make the Premier and the Treasurer aware of the needs of the Nanango electorate. On many issues I will sound like a broken record as once again I will raise roads, health and many yet unmet needs. I will start with our roads.

RACQ recently graded the D'Aguilar Highway as one of the worst and most needing of urgent upgrades. This particular road is the artery for those travelling north via the inland route. Many travel this way to get out of the coastal road chaos and it is this highway which runs right through the Nanango electorate that is the preferred route for many heavy transports. Yet it is a road that continually misses out on appropriate and necessary reworking but instead continues with merely patches and bandaids. How many of the fatal crashes could have been reduced by engineering improvements to roads and roadsides?

I do not ask for this road to receive essential overhauling just because I think it needs it but because it is a highway where three roads merge into one. The Beerwah Road, as many know, is renowned for car and motorcycle accidents. Because of the number of injuries and deaths, this road has received much-needed attention. The Beerwah Road feeds Gold Coast traffic on to the D'Aguilar Highway, doubling the traffic flow on what the RACQ itself has rated as one of the worst and most needing of urgent upgrades. There is a third road. The Brisbane Valley Highway also feeds on to this particular road. There are three very busy roads channelled into one and yet this road cannot get the attention it needs.

All this traffic threads up the Blackbutt Range, a road recognised as needing major work. It gets put on the RIP and then removed again. The need to upgrade the Blackbutt Range cannot be put off forever because the cost of upgrading is only getting dearer. But to date it gets patches and bandaids as well. It has a very steep pitch. No truck, unless broken down, would dare to stop in the tiny lay-bys and risk losing what little forward momentum they have. Anything other than a small truck will not pull over to allow passing traffic. By the time they get the prime mover over they head out again before the tail of the B-double even clears the main road. Cars simply cannot pass—the lay-bys are far too small. Queensland Rail should be carrying much of the heavy goods that these trucks carry but, as members know, we do not have any trains left in the South Burnett or the Burnett.

The trucks are bigger, heavier, more numerous and service more industries and businesses as the districts grow through people taking a tree change. The cars and caravans are more numerous as baby boomers join the older generation of grey nomads. Please give us a break. Do not try to tell us that the opposite of what we know is true. The road is busier, more dangerous and desperately in need of

overtaking lanes. Overtaking lanes are needed to accommodate the increased traffic flow. Join up the little lay-bys. Put in an overtaking lane. A little imagination, the will to do it and a fair bit of cash will in fact achieve it.

We have the Gold Coast traffic via Beerwah Road, as I said, the north Brisbane-Caboolture traffic via the D'Aguilar Highway and the south Brisbane-Ipswich traffic via the Brisbane Valley Highway all funnelled up this very dangerous range on a road that is described, as I said, as the worst and most needing of upgrades. Yet nothing substantial is achieved and this can only be called a shame and a disgrace. But let us keep going along the D'Aguilar Highway for it is a long road. The Yarraman section of the highway has the dubious honour of being named as one of the most dangerous stretches of road. An AAA research report allegedly shows that a one-star improvement in a road's design has the potential to halve the community's cost from crashes involving death and serious injury, while a two-star improvement halves it again. Surely this is an admirable thing to achieve.

The Kilcoy-Murgon Road from Jimna to Landcruiser Mountain Park is another dangerous road. There are 15 kilometres of dirt. It is made more dangerous due to the influx of tourists from the cities who are inexperienced in driving on gravel roads. It is not unusual to meet vehicles on the wrong side of the road and on crests and curves and sometimes they are even parked side by side on blind corners while the drivers talk to each other. It is unbelievable but it is true. Most city drivers believe that if there is no white line on the road they can have all the bitumen, but as most country people know you head off onto the grass verges to allow anyone to pass and you do slow down just in case people do not realise they should. The government has a duty of care to our tourists. Bitumen, signage and a centre white line will help prevent serious mishaps.

We are currently seeing far too many children critically injured or dying in accidents involving off-road, unregistered motorcycles. In Blackbutt a man by the name of John Trousdell, a semiretired cattle farmer, has turned his farm at Blackbutt into a place where four-wheel drives, trail bikes, mountain bikes and quad bikes can be driven and ridden for fun but with extreme safety. He tolerates no misbehaviour, unlike many of these parks. His dream is to turn this facility into a training area where kids can be taught how to handle these powerful machines under strict supervision. He believes that they are currently let loose by indulgent parents without any training at all. He wants to see the government become as concerned as he is about the waste of young lives on unregistered motorbikes and to do something about it. He and I both encourage the government to look at having no-nonsense facilities like John's in every town.

Coming from a rural area, biosecurity is a major concern. Although I do believe Labor governments never fully understand the requirements and the value of this sector—and I base that on the continual reduction in the DPIF budget every year—I was pleased to see \$90.3 million going towards boosting biosecurity measures. I can only credit this 10 per cent increase to the equine influenza outbreak last year and the impact it had on associated industries. I never thought I would be thanking an outbreak of a disease for anything, but EI brought to the attention of the government the devastation that the loss of biosecurity can bring to our shores. Closure of biosecurity offices all around the state will cost those producing food and the state very dearly. There is, however, much more funding needed for groups such as catchment care groups to help in the control of blue heliotrope, African lovegrass, parthenium, creeping lantana and cat's claw to name but a few. Invading weeds will strangle food production unless adequate funding is earmarked to stop them. We hear so much of an impending food shortage but little or no increase has been given to controlling these weeds. Governments must increase the fight to control or eradicate invasive weeds that threaten the little productive land that still exists.

I note the \$5.6 million enhancement for establishing more state owned hardwood plantations but the dropping of drought assistance at the same time when, although there have been deluges on the coastal fringe, much of the state remains in drought. Land converted to lifestyle blocks and hardwood forests do not produce and feed the country. It is well known that seasonal crops do more to offset carbon emissions and trees which become neutral after a few years, yet governments invest in timber but not food crops for the populace. It is a case of more timber and less tucker.

Speaking of timber, my office has been called by Rod McInnes from the Queensland Timber Board. Apparently Forestry Plantations Queensland is refusing to proceed to arbitration as directed by Minister Mulherin. This may result in the complete closure of the Yarraman sawmill by the end of the month. I ask the minister here to urgently attend to this matter. Get Forestry Plantations Queensland to the table and protect the jobs of the workers of the Yarraman sawmill.

The mayors of the region have stated that, since the amalgamation of the councils, needs associated with the moves have been exposed which were not recognised at the time of amalgamation. There exists a need for additional funding towards information technology set-up costs—a uniformity of equipment which will assist with the linking of council offices in the various towns of the region—and a need for more office space. The council believes there is a need for government to implement town-planner training, possibly through the local TAFE colleges, even if it is only for a junior assistant level.

There is the issue of the sealing of the Bunya Mountains Road and the fact that roads and bridges are in extreme need of repair. Some have been closed for over 18 months and this, too, is a shameful occurrence. Funding is needed for repairs to collapsed culverts and assistance with funding is needed to attend to the repairs and/or replacement of local infrastructure, such as filtration systems on the local pools. There are many areas where financial assistance is required, and it is asked that the government look favourably on these and future regional council requests.

The South Burnett Regional Council has also asked me to put forward a request for funding towards a Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen memorial cultural centre. Although there was a reluctance by the previous Beattie government to supply any substantial funding towards this project, the council is hoping that the Bligh government will be a little more willing.

A lack of town-planners in the new amalgamated shires is causing enormous problems also. Each officer has up to 50 applications in front of them at any given time, but a lack of available trained people is preventing council from hiring anybody suitable to take a load off the present officers. Due to the workload the error level is unacceptably high, and the council has asked that government initiate a drive to encourage more future town-planners.

Now to the major issue of health. More incentives to attract dentists, doctors and other medical staff to the South Burnett are needed. I know that the minister knows this, I know that the Premier knows this and I know that every member knows it: dentists and doctors in many areas have closed their books because they are unable to handle any more patients. There are no replacements when doctors go on holidays or are sick or when specialists get sick and go on holidays, and one has to ask: what is the government doing to help fill these vacancies when they occur?

One of my constituents broke a tooth recently. He always goes to a private dentist but the private dentist could not fit him in until the end of July. His broken tooth not only ached but also lacerated his tongue and his mouth and he could not eat. He decided he would go to the public dentist, but they turned him away because he did not have a pensioner card. He found relief only by travelling all the way to Toowoomba to find a dentist there who took pity on him and his pain. Surely, utilising mature-age, retired professionals to fill gaps during sickness or holidays could be an option. At this point, there is only one dentist operating at the Kingaroy Base Hospital dental unit when there should be four. There is no way that person is able to make any impression on the waiting lists and they continue to blow out. I have been told that more dentists will arrive in approximately 12 weeks to four months. This is not going to make a dent in the waiting list at all. As I said, we need another two beyond that.

Establishing a renal unit at Kingaroy Hospital remains a passion for me and many others in the area. We were informed last year that we would get one and then we were told we would not. The minister says in one breath there is a two-chair, self-care renal dialysis unit at Cherbourg Hospital available to South Burnett residents but then in the next breath states that none of these people currently travelling from the South Burnett to Toowoomba three times a week for haemodialysis are able to use it. That in itself was a useless statement. Tell us what we do not know. Tell us when a renal unit will be built. I have to state here that the money has been set aside to look into establishing such a unit in Kingaroy, and I thank the Treasurer for that very small step in the right direction.

The price of petrol is everyone's concern. One alarming trend from higher fuel prices is that dealers are reporting to me that a large number of young people are now using their credit cards to obtain fuel. This can only compound an already dire situation of rising personal debt and will ultimately lead to more bankruptcies. I can only hope that the measures put in place by the government will work. Fuel prices continue to impact heavily on people in the patient travel assistance scheme. Fifteen cents a kilometre is better than nothing, but really not even 50c is going to help the terrible financial pain South Burnett patients are going to feel when they travel to Toowoomba or Brisbane on a regular basis for specialist care.

Concern has been expressed in news items on ABC regional radio recently that people will stop travelling to the cities for medical treatment because they will not be able to afford it. This I know to be true. I have had this stated to me personally by a local man who was recently diagnosed with cancer. His words were along the lines of, 'It's too hard, too costly, and I don't want me or my family to waste what little time I have trying to work within a system that fights you for every penny.' That is a very sad state of affairs.

Why isn't it possible to pay the South Burnett Community Integrated Transport Service, known as SBCITS, to help provide transport for anyone who needs to visit one of our major hospitals? They do a huge amount towards relieving the lack of transport in our area. Their drivers are all volunteers, and passengers can make a donation if it suits their pride. I believe the government would overcome rural transport problems by funding SBCITS and allowing them to travel further afield and not restricting their movement. Please remember that we are talking about patients undertaking long trips, often in great discomfort, and I ask the government to seriously consider this. It is a cheaper option than many others.

Consideration must now be given to building a new hospital for the South Burnett. The current hospital has been tweaked and stretched and has no capacity to be tweaked anymore. I note the assertion that our health system and hospitals will receive the majority of funding received from the sale of our

airports, and I ask: is any of this actually going to go into the Nanango electorate? Let us look at the statistics. As much as I hate statistics, these are so bad that doctoring them in any way will not even make them much better. Robbing Peter to pay Paul is how I see selling the airports to improve hospitals. Isn't it like major retail stores selling off all their delivery vans to maintain their shelving? At least the airports are major profitable assets giving good return.

Kingaroy Police Station is still so far below standard, even after minimal renovations. I have been told there is nothing wrong with it that a bulldozer couldn't fix, and I have to agree. I was also told that the commissioner is well aware of Kingaroy Police Station's increasing 'dump' status and is doing whatever he can to remedy the situation, but the fact is that the government must erect an entirely new station. The government is currently spending money on termite checks every six months to keep the insects at bay and, believe me, that is not cheap. A lick of paint can cover a multitude of sins, but they are still there and the government can only fool itself for so long.

The police at Kingaroy deserve a new police station. I thank the government for the new station at Woodford, but Kingaroy police have waited long enough. Please let it be their turn to have a new premises. Those who are forced to work in the courthouse and serve jury duty deserve to do so in a decent building. They should not be forced to wait outside in extreme heat or cold weather or be housed in the nearby CWA. At least they have shelter and water, but they deserve better.

I note that a lot of money is being spent on new ambulance stations. Although I know that is necessary, too, I wonder whether we have enough staff to man them. I would expect the answer is no. There needs to be more training for new emergency staff and greater support for the staff we have now stretched to their limits. The non-emergency ambulance transport that constituents in my area, such as dialysis patients, heavily rely on needs some sort of assistance to enable it to be on time, at the very least. Patients have been forced to miss their appointments they have been waiting a long time to get because the non-emergency ambulance has been an hour late picking them up. This often results, I am told, in patients being forced to wait several extra weeks or months for a new appointment. Although it may not seem much to members here in the House, the stress, added expense and other associated costs et cetera for the patients and their families are an impost they cannot afford.

The chronic shortage of affordable housing in my area is a huge concern. I have been told by one of the community services in my area that there are up to seven new homeless people each week. It is sometimes necessary for the government to repair, repaint and recarpet commission houses after tenants have left, but is that always necessary? Being provided some accommodation that has had a good clean-up is preferable to sleeping rough, and this would shorten waiting lists.

The Kingaroy TAFE facility is a major asset which is underutilised. It would be a fantastic teaching facility with some forethought and the provision of a bus to transport students from outlying towns such as Yarraman, Proston and Murgon to the north. I have mentioned in this speech the possibility that training could be undertaken in this facility, and I ask the government to do everything in its power to allow this much-needed facility to be a shining light for education in the state. Education has virtually been ignored in this budget, and teaching staff feel affronted by this omission. I have not had a lot of feedback yet but what I have had is very negative.

The WaterWise rebate scheme has been refused to those who are not connected to a town water supply, but where do these rural residents get their water from when their tanks and dams run dry? They get it from the town supply, of course. It would therefore be in the government's best interests to continue rebating rural residents for tanks, and I ask the government to review this decision.

Toogoolawah Golf Club is in dire need of help with their greens. Their sister club in Esk has been able, with the help of a federal grant, to get greywater, but this has not been possible for Toogoolawah. A treatment plant capable of treating Toogoolawah effluent to the point where it could be used will cost \$60,000 and then there would be another \$120,000 for pipes, storage et cetera. Although Brisbane has had a good downfall, it is essential the government does not forget these small towns which struggle on a daily basis to maintain community facilities, and offers of assistance or favourably looking upon grant applications from these organisations by government would be a great help.

This budget has its negatives and positives for the Nanango electorate, and I ask that the budget allocation to the electorate be recognised. I table the budget allocations that apply to the Nanango electorate.

Tabled paper: Document titled 'Nanango Electorate Budget Allocations 2008-09'.

As I said, there is good and bad in this budget. It is city centric; it is south-east corner centric. However, I congratulate the Treasurer on his first budget. It could not have been an easy thing to do, and I congratulate the Premier as well. There are so many things I could raise but I have very limited time, so I will finish now and I ask that all the things that I have addressed and many of the other things that will be brought to government in the next few months will be looked at favourably and addressed with the hope of seeing them all come to fruition.