



Speech by

Ms Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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APPROPRIATION BILLS; REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms GRACE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (3.59 pm): I rise to support the Appropriation Bill 2008. I find it a great privilege to deliver my first budget speech, together with Treasurer Andrew Fraser's and the Bligh government's first budget. I take this opportunity to commend both the Premier and the Treasurer for delivering a budget for all of Queensland which delivers benefits for people living in regional and urban centres.

This budget places this great state in a solid operating position which, together with a strong balance sheet growth, is an essential element to producing a strong economic and fiscal outlook for our future. There are many highlights in this budget which work together to deliver much-needed benefits to those most in need, concentrate on building the infrastructure for the future, and boost much-needed assistance to the sick, the elderly and the next generation. In other words, this is a well-balanced Labor budget which I am proud to be part of and which will continue to allow Queensland to outpace the national rate of economic growth for the 13th consecutive year in 2008-09.

On all national economic indicators Queensland is the leading state, with economic growth of 4.25 per cent compared to national growth of 2.75 per cent; employment growth of 2.5 per cent—double the national rate of 1.25 per cent; an unemployment rate of 3.75 per cent, being a 34-year low and below the national rate of 4.5 per cent for the fifth consecutive year; and expected business investment growth of 9.25 per cent in an environment where Queensland maintains its tax competitiveness, with Queenslanders paying an average of \$274 less in state tax than taxpayers in other states and territories.

There is no doubt that Queensland is a fast-growing state and is facing all the pressures that come with this extraordinary growth, whether you are in the regions or in the inner city of Brisbane, which makes up most of my electorate. To ease this pressure and build for the future, this budget embarks on record infrastructure and health expenditure, the envy of every other state in Australia. But it does this by undertaking responsible borrowings, ensuring the Queensland budget has no net debt, thus maintaining our AAA credit rating.

Most in business and commerce and all homeowners know that responsible borrowings and debt levels create wealth. Just ask any homeowner in my electorate who has borrowed responsibly and seen their wealth grow in line with the boom in housing prices which we have witnessed over recent years. As my parents often say, 'You have to make the debt to get ahead and create wealth,' and that is exactly what this budget is doing. It is a shame that those opposite just do not get it.

It is especially pleasing to refer to a number of the key measures in this budget that I know will greatly benefit the residents of Brisbane Central. For many young Queenslanders homeownership is certainly fast becoming beyond their reach, but particularly so in my electorate of Brisbane Central. Changes included in this budget to assist first home buyers, I believe, will go a long way for those purchasing a property under \$500,000.

On learning of these changes in the budget, I looked at the weekend's real estate pages of the paper and found many units, apartments and dwellings in my electorate well under \$500,000 where potential first

home buyers would benefit by not paying one cent of stamp and mortgage duty. This makes entering the housing market a more attractive and easier proposition, and I am positive many inner-city Brisbane residents will welcome this initiative.

In addition, this budget provides around \$7.8 million for the Queensland Housing Affordability Strategy, a whole-of-government approach to planning, development, land supply and infrastructure-charging issues. The area of Bowen Hills in my electorate has already been declared an urban development area, and I welcome the \$9.5 million for the Urban Land Development Authority—a body that will develop a scheme for this site which will feature a range of residential, retail and commercial development including affordable housing. This is great planning for the inner city of Brisbane, and I look forward to a great outcome.

A \$17 million land tax relief package is also provided which includes lower land tax rates for approximately 15,000 resident individuals and 17,500 companies—a much welcome relief for inner-city residents who have been caught in the boom in land values in recent times in my electorate.

I welcome the \$6.3 billion Education and Training budget allocation which includes much-needed additional funds of \$100 million over two years for maintenance of state schools. I recently wrote to the Treasurer to ensure that funds would be committed for additional classroom accommodation and maintenance at Wilston State School, and I am very pleased at the \$3.88 million for classrooms and a \$9,000 injection for maintenance included in the budget. I also look forward to other schools in my electorate benefiting from additional maintenance funds.

I also recently wrote to the Treasurer requesting adequate funding in the budget to complete the Fortitude Valley Police Station. With the \$7.63 million allocated for 2008-09, at a total cost of \$13.2 million, this project can now be delivered on time, providing much-needed additional space for our hardworking Police Service. These funds will enable the new Fortitude Valley Police Station to open its doors in early 2009, with refurbishment of the heritage listed station to be completed later in the year. This station will have a great boost on the police presence in a very busy inner-city suburb and allow a better delivery of essential police service. In addition, it is pleasing to note over \$240 million allocated for the new Supreme and District courts and refurbishment of the Brisbane Children's Court, all located in my electorate.

South-east Queensland is in particular experiencing both booming economic and population growth, putting increased pressure on our roads, public transport and capital works. This budget provides for a record \$17 billion infrastructure spend in 2008-09 which includes spending in my electorate of \$80.41 million for the Airport Link project, which will reduce traffic and solve the airport roundabout bottleneck; \$14.09 million for the upgrade of Brunswick Street Station at a total cost of \$32.8 million; \$204.5 million for construction of the Northern Busway between the Royal Children's Hospital and Kedron; and \$31.46 million for the construction of a pedestrian and cycle bridge from Tank Street to Kurilpa Point.

Allocated funds of \$1.91 million for preparation of a Smart City Master Plan for Brisbane City which will identify a holistic vision and structure for the city centre, aimed at enhancing connectivity throughout the Brisbane city centre, is also very much welcome.

The 2008-09 budget also includes an investigation into a rapid transit system between Newstead and West End. I know that the residents of Brisbane Central are keen to learn of the outcome of these investigations and would welcome such a system.

Queensland's older residents and pensioners have received a helping hand with a number of initiatives that will save money for many of the elderly living in the Brisbane Central electorate. These include land tax abolished on aged-care facilities; a \$20 increase in electricity rebate up to \$165 per annum; an SEQ Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme; and a Reticulated Natural Gas Rebate Scheme. The above demonstrates that the Bligh government is determined to provide some relief where it matters most—in the hip pockets of seniors and pensioners.

Queenslanders with a disability were big winners in this state budget, with an allocation of more than \$1 billion which will be directed towards service delivery including early intervention and prevention. I can already think of one particular family in my electorate that will hopefully benefit from this additional funding, which is aimed at reducing the stress and anxiety often experienced by families and carers, and I welcome the nearly \$1 million to provide postschool options for young adults with a disability. I fully endorse focusing support around early and timely intervention and ensuring the right services are provided to the right people. I believe an extra \$25 million over four years committed to supporting people with a disability and their families who are in need of urgent assistance will be a great benefit to those who need this help.

Homelessness is also a major issue, particularly in my electorate, and it is also most pleasing to have a total amount of nearly \$18 million allocated to support young people, families and individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness as well as projects that provide additional affordable housing.

In conclusion, I am particularly impressed with a record \$8.35 billion being pumped into Queensland's public health system that continues widespread reform and expanded services. I know that

the people of Brisbane Central will welcome any assistance to our great Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital and will gladly accept any increase in the numbers of doctors, nurses and allied health professionals which will go a long way to easing the burden on emergency departments and surgical wards.

This budget is good for Queensland. I commend the Treasurer on his first-class first budget. The Bligh government's first budget is a fair and balanced budget that still keeps Queensland the leading state, keeps Queensland in the black with a net operating surplus of \$809 million in 2008-09, and delivers the building of Queensland for a better future. I commend the bills to the House.