



Speech by

John-Paul Langbroek

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL (NO. 2); APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 2)

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (4.16 pm): It is my pleasure to rise to speak to the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill (No. 2) 2007 and Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2007. As the shadow Treasurer and member for Moggill has stated, these bills provide supplementary funding for government departments for the 2006-07 financial year. My comments will be specifically addressed towards the appropriation bill, which I note authorises the Treasurer to spend nearly an extra \$4 billion from the consolidated fund for departments. I note that, of this, \$21.6 million will be spent on health, making up the shortfall between the budgeted amount for health and the actual expenditure during the last financial year.

I would like to note for the record that the budget for health in 2006-07 was over \$6 billion and this year in 2007-08 it is over \$7 billion. So it would seem to be not a very large amount that is having to be appropriated, but I am interested in where that money has been spent and why it has, because there is not a lot of detail given in this bill.

I note the concerns of my coalition colleagues—and also the member for Gladstone—such as the members for Warrego, Burnett and Toowoomba South about health matters in their areas. Clearly, these are matters that affect all Queenslanders who have ongoing concerns with the health system.

The supplementary appropriation bills are interesting in the sense that this additional spending goes beyond the budget. It gives the Treasurer a mandate to hand out money not accounted for in the central budget. As I mentioned before, the question needs to be asked: how does a government determine the extent of extra expenditure and where is this money invested? Unlike the detailed ministerial portfolio statements, which itemise expenditure, the bill before the House does not provide any detail of where this revenue goes once it is handed over to the department.

We note that the Bligh government is no stranger to spending beyond its means. The most recent state budget—and this is a point made especially by the member for Moggill and the member for Toowoomba South—illustrated how the government is punching above its weight when it comes to borrowing and spending in Queensland. For our approximately \$32 billion of income for the budget for 2006-07, Queensland will soon be \$55 billion in debt. The interest payments on \$55 billion, as other members have mentioned, is about \$10 million a day. It begs the question of how many elective surgery procedures could the health minister fund if he had some portion of that \$10 million a day to spend? How many patients would receive a new lease of life if they received their surgeries sooner through programs like Surgery Connect? Yet, instead of tackling our crippling waiting lists or building the vital infrastructure that we need, the Bligh government is wasting nearly \$10 million a day on interest repayments.

Closer to home, the Gold Coast streets are gridlocked because there are not enough viable public transport options on the Gold Coast—one of the fastest growing regions in the country. The Gold Coast is the sixth largest city in Australia with population projections forecasting no reprieve from growth over the next few decades and yet the Bligh government will not commit to building a decent public transport system that will bring the Gold Coast into the 21st century. Melbourne has its trams, Sydney has its trains,

Brisbane has its buses but on the Gold Coast residents have no choice but to use their cars because the current public transport system is inadequate.

It is of great concern to me and others on the coast that it has been recently indicated that the \$600 million that has been set aside for the Gold Coast rapid transit system may now not be enough to complete that system. The minister for transport might be able to build something that will stand the test of time rather than be deficient within 10 years if he could spend some of the \$10 million a day that is spent on loan repayments on getting our roads moving again. Instead, that money will be sunk in interest repayments on a debt that this government will struggle to service. The Bligh government is driving Queensland more and more into debt.

We saw this morning just how cash strapped Queensland is under the Bligh government. The Premier has been forced to sell off more of the state's assets to pay for social infrastructure. This time she is selling airports to build hospitals. I am happy that Mackay and Cairns will finally get the infrastructure and services they need. North Queensland has been the economic powerhouse of this state since the mining boom. The Bligh government pockets more than a billion dollars each year in mining royalties and millions more from tourism to famous destinations like the Barrier Reef and the Whitsundays. Yet, despite the massive injection of funds it receives from the north of Brisbane, the state government has failed to deliver the infrastructure and services the north so desperately needs.

Since I became the shadow health minister I have been highlighting the shortcomings of the health services in regional Queensland, particularly in Cairns and Mackay. I have visited these facilities on a number of occasions. I have spoken to local doctors, residents and patients. I have been concerned at the state of their hospitals. In Mackay during the heavy rains surgery has to be cancelled because the operating theatres flood. Access to the hospital is obstructed by running water, making it difficult for ambulances to reach the emergency department. Mackay Hospital is outdated, dilapidated and simply cannot meet the needs of the local community.

I note the injection of funds into health in the last state budget, including additional moneys for capital works programs to upgrade hospitals, and yet a boost in the department's bottom line is no longer enough. The Labor government can no longer bankroll basic infrastructure from the central budget, forcing it into an assets fire sale in order to afford to build new hospitals.

Today's announcement that the state government will be selling off the Mackay and Cairns regional airports and its remaining share in the Brisbane airport raises questions about how this government goes about appropriating public moneys. It seems whenever there is a health crisis on the front page of the paper the health minister is able to come up with new money to put out the spot fires.

In Cairns and Mackay the local media have been waging robust campaigns for new hospitals. Every week the *Cairns Post* and the *Daily Mercury* in Mackay have filled their pages with damning stories about the inadequacy of health services in their regions. They implore the Premier, the health minister and the local members to wake up to the problems in the north and take action to ensure that patients' lives are not put at risk because of insufficient services.

It was interesting to note that the week before last we even had the member for Cairns, Desley Boyle, suggest that some of the Cairns mudflats may be able to be filled in to allow for the esplanade to be widened so that the hospital can stay in its current position. This is a former environment minister who I remember standing up at the Rockhampton regional parliament and saying that she was going to stop dolphin feeding in Tin Can Bay. She has seriously put forward a potential solution for retaining the Cairns Hospital in its current position by filling in part of the mudflats. It is unbelievable what the member says in Cairns compared to what she must say around the cabinet table in Brisbane.

It has been a hard-fought campaign in these two centres, and one in relation to which I have been very supportive. I have been vocal about the problems in Cairns and Mackay. I am pleased that the residents will finally get the services they so desperately need and deserve, but I note the comments of the honourable member for Maroochydore. She asked what is going to happen in the years before these facilities are built. These communities are struggling with the facilities that are clearly unable to service the needs at the moment. What kind of precedent does it set? Should we be encouraging the *Townsville Bulletin*, the *Rockhampton Morning Bulletin*, the *Toowoomba Chronicle* and the *Gold Coast Bulletin* to wage similar campaigns to get a better deal from this media-driven government? The health minister's method of addressing the health crisis—throwing buckets of money to put out spot fires—is unsustainable as is this government's fiscal management.

We have seen in the last few days that the health minister has managed to find a tin can full of money under the bed to fund more elective surgery procedures at Noosa Hospital only after the hospital begged for more money in order to stay within budget. The hospital threatened to stop admitting public patients unless the state government upped its investment in the hospital.

It was a similar story at the Princess Alexandra Hospital last year. The hospital was running over budget so the Premier and health minister delved into their pockets to bail them out. It seems the more

publicity a person can get the more likely they are to be treated. Does that mean we say to Queenslanders who courteously wait their turn in a queue that they need to be out there trying to get some publicity because that is the way they can get treated? I do not think that people who want to do things the right way should have to act in such a way in order to get treatment under this government.

I am not questioning the need for greater investment in the state's hospitals. One look at the elective surgery and specialist outpatient waiting lists clearly shows that the state government needs to be spending a lot on health. What I am concerned about, however, is that the money the state already spends on health is not paying dividends. Queenslanders are not seeing any real benefit from the massive injection of funds into health. There has been little change in public waiting lists. In fact, in most cases we have actually seen an increase in the number of patients waiting for surgery for specialist appointments.

It is the same story with dental services and mental health services. In Townsville, Charters Towers and Cairns most recently we are seeing the school dental van program being scaled back. The dentists, the hygienists, the therapists and the nurses who work in these programs are now only going to provide examinations. If a person needs more treatment for their children they are going to have to go privately despite the fact that this government spends more on dental health than any other state. That is not to mention the morale problems that that is going to cause for those working within the system. If they clearly do not feel like they are using all their professional skills and are becoming deskilled then they are likely to suffer morale problems and not want to stay within Queensland Health.

This is something that was outlined by Peter Forster in his review. He suggested engaging more with the private sector to find some innovative ways of dealing with dental issues especially. When dentists working within the public sector feel that all they are doing is extractions or temporary fillings they will feel they are becoming deskilled and this will lead to them choosing to go elsewhere. That leads to problems with recruiting within the dental sector.

There has been a not insignificant boost in mental health spending in the 2007-08 budget but so far this has failed to improve the system for patients seeking help for mental health problems. The community suffers the consequences of an inadequate system. There are no community based mental health beds in Queensland so patients with less serious ailments are sent back to the community because there are not enough acute mental health beds in hospital.

I do not think I need to remind the House about the recent tragic case of Carmel Wuth on the Gold Coast. Her sad story illustrates the human cost of this government's financial mismanagement. I want to note that today's *Courier-Mail* reveals that overtime payments for nurses have blown out for the first eight months of this financial year. If that continues for the last quarter of the year it will result in a larger supplementary appropriation for 2007-08 and we will be standing here this time next year talking about a larger appropriation for Health.

I also note that the recruitment program that the health minister is talking about—extra doctors, nurses and allied health professionals—has been put on hold, obviously because of budgetary constraints. This is in a memo sent out by the acting director-general of Queensland. I have great concerns about stopping recruitment programs to provide professionals that the Queensland public needs to maintain the health system.