



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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APPROPRIATION BILLS; REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (3.30 pm): It is my pleasure to rise to speak to the appropriation bills 2008-09. I want to acknowledge some funding for the Gold Coast in my electorate and in my portfolio of Health, but of course the Treasurer would be disappointed if I did not express a number of concerns.

Queensland is experiencing unprecedented prosperity. The resources boom, skyrocketing property prices and increased taxes have provided a cash cow for the Bligh government. But instead of banking the mining royalties, stamp duties and other taxes, the Premier and the government have spent all the money and borrowed big to make up for it. A decade of neglect means that billions now have to be allocated to play catch-up.

I note in the budget that coal royalties are going from just over \$1 billion to \$3.2 billion this year. That is the way that the budget is going to actually achieve a proposed \$809 million surplus. I find it staggering that a government that claims that it is looking over the horizon could not have somehow done something for one of its best contributors—the coalmining operations—and somehow been able to sort this out in a better way than it has done with a tripling of royalties.

I note, too, that in terms of debt, today's *Australian* has an article about Kevin Foley plunging South Australia into debt. I note that in the same period that our general government sector is going to have a \$21 billion debt, the South Australian budget is going to be \$1.9 billion in debt, yet here we are in the same country. I know the member for Stafford considers South Australia to be a Third World economy, but I find it amazing that we can have such a disparity between South Australia and Queensland with our budget being \$21 billion in debt in 2011-12 and South Australia supposedly 'plunged' into debt, as the paper says today, at \$1.9 billion.

I want to look at the Fuel Subsidy Scheme. I note we have a Treasurer who talks about global issues. On Tuesday he said that this state is prepared to spend \$20 million on bureaucrats just to stop the possibility of someone from interstate getting some use of the fuel tax rebate. On Wednesday on the front page of the *Australian* he urged a tax revolution. He actually believes that we should give back GST payments, which he mentioned in his maiden speech, in return for a share of income tax which could be applied at different rates across the country. I think that modern-day Queenslanders think of themselves as Australians first and then Queenslanders, not the other way round. On one hand the Treasurer wants to be Barack Obama but when we scratch the surface we find that he is really just Pauline Hanson. Most people would say that the Treasurer's attitude of, 'I hate Mexicans and they ain't getting any of our money,' and, 'We'll spend \$20 million to stop them getting it,' is from an era that he normally decries. His comments in *Hansard* on Tuesday in this place were—

We do not believe that there will be savings realised out of the fuel subsidy scheme.

...

This is not an exercise where we are seeking to save money.

He should be trying to save money. He is the Treasurer of the state. A Treasurer of any organisation at any level is supposed to be concerned with saving money. As the Treasurer, he should be concerned with the integrity, efficiency, economy and effectiveness of the budget. But the best comment in question time on Tuesday was from the genius from Logan, the member for Logan, the Hon. John Mickel who said—

If a person is currently driving without a drivers licence then they will not have a drivers licence to present to get the fuel subsidy. Is that not a great initiative too?

It must have been a very interesting cabinet meeting at which this fuel tax subsidy scheme was proposed. The transport minister said, 'I think that's a great idea because that means that people who are unlicensed won't be able to get the fuel subsidy.' I am sure that the other ministers must have sat around and said, 'Actually that is a great idea, isn't it?'

Why do we not have more police to catch disqualified drivers who do not have licences rather than hoping that they do not get the fuel tax subsidy when they go to a petrol station? I also respectfully suggest that, given there are a number of businessmen in Queensland who used to take advantage of the fact that there were different licensing and taxation regimes for cigarettes, if we are going to embark on this scheme of only owners of Queensland drivers licenses being able to collect, there will be some way of getting around this system. It may well be that a system such as when I caught a bus to Adelaide as a uni student will come about. There was a changeover of bus drivers just outside the Currumbin Sanctuary. Who is to say that truck drivers who do not want to fill up with 3,000 litres of petrol and therefore save about \$240 may not just get Queensland drivers to be employed over the border and make sure they drive the trucks? Why would it not stop someone who has a Queensland licence going up to someone and saying, 'Mate, do you want to save \$240? Give me \$100 and I will fill up your truck for you.' There will be a way to get around this. I cannot believe that we are spending money to not actually save money.

This year the Auditor-General handed down a report on enhancing accountability through annual reporting. As a member of the Public Accounts Committee I want to commend it to all members. It is report to parliament No. 1 for 2008. In this he addressed the Bligh government's methodology in reporting. The Auditor-General's comments could not be more relevant when we consider the manner in which this year's budget has been presented. There is no consistency in the way Queensland's financials are reported. This year's system differs from last year's, making it much more difficult to compare the two. The government talks about transparency and accountability yet the Auditor-General slammed the Bligh government for what he perceived to be a critical lack of accountability to parliament. Quoting from the report he said—

Planning documents such as Ministerial Portfolio Statements—

the ones we have just received on Tuesday—

and agencies' strategic plans do not set clear expectations of results and lack relevant and appropriate performance measures

The Bligh government has completely ignored the Auditor-General's report in this budget. Last year the MPS—the Ministerial Portfolio Statement—for health was almost 80 pages. This year it was 44. This budget is virtually meaningless to the people of Queensland or stakeholders who are trying to read it. The Auditor-General suggested that it seemed as though sometimes these things were written in such a way as to confuse people who try to read it—and I think he would confirm that. As an example, if we read the budget papers on Health we cannot find out how many people received breast cancer screening; we can only see what percentage of patients were screened for breast cancer defined by target population. Unless we know the target population—and it is in the accompanying notes, but it is in type that is so small the target audience could not read it—a percentage is meaningless. It is meaningless unless we have a base number to work with.

The performance measures that the Treasurer and health minister use to gauge Health are often also meaningless. As an example, according to the Service Delivery Statements the state government will spend \$367 million on primary health care—a very important measure, yet in the Service Delivery Statements there are only six measures to indicate where that money will be spent. Two of them are to do with dental treatment, two of them are for the 13HEALTH number including the percentage of calls to 13HEALTH answered within 20 seconds and the other two are to do with the percentage of women who, during their pregnancy, were smoking after 20 weeks and—the final one—the rate of potentially preventable admitted patient episodes of care. It is about six centimetres in the Service Delivery Statements accounting for \$367 million in the budget.

How do Queenslanders know that they are getting bang for their buck when we have 35 new measures in the Service Delivery Statement and 29 discontinued ones? Some of those discontinued ones provided very valuable insights into practical aspects of treatment including things like mental health and acute inpatient average length of stay. That used to increase because the mental health facilities were so poor that people were staying longer or there were not enough beds. So that measure was very valuable. The measure of the average length of stay for acute inpatient services has also been discontinued. As I say, there are 29 discontinued measures and instead of them we have these nebulous measures put into the SDS. It is very difficult to assess the budget.

I acknowledge the shadow Treasurer's contribution, who noted that, if our GOCs were publicly listed, analysts would be telling investors to steer well clear. He said—

The increase in GOC debt translates—

this is over the forward estimates—

to a debt-to-asset ratio of 72%—an extraordinary 20% more than last year's figures.

A debt-to-asset ratio of 72%, that is 72c of debt for every \$1 of assets, would be considered a crisis for any business or company owner.

When looking at the health budget, if asked whether you would invest in Queensland Health if it were a publicly listed company on the Australian Stock Exchange, when you look at the department's track record there is no way you would buy stocks in a business that had failed on so many performance indicators that the government felt compelled to change them. Imagine if companies said they are not going to report earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation, but that is the equivalent of what this government is doing—changing the parameters every year.

The total government debt of over \$64 billion by 2011-12 is like a secret credit card that the breadwinner of the Queensland family—the Treasurer and this Labor government—is using to maintain the people of Queensland's lifestyle. The people of Queensland are relying on the breadwinner to provide. This use of the credit card is masking the fact that the state is living beyond its means. We have all seen the consequences of too much debt, especially in the last nine months. Whether it is a family, a company or even a country, paying back the principal of the debt is dispiriting. The interest is often hard enough when interest rates are rising, especially when one keeps looking at the balance and it is not going down. It can break relationships. In this case the debt is going up to a total of \$64 billion by 2011-12.

Coming back to the health budget, as other members including the member for Bundaberg have just acknowledged, the health budget has increased dramatically from \$5.35 billion in 2005-06. In the next financial year Queensland taxpayers will spend a record \$8.36 billion on health—a 36 per cent increase in public health funding over four financial years to 2008-09. But, as the member for Bundaberg said, we still have massive public hospital waiting lists for elective surgery. Some aspects of our health system are actually worse off now than they were a few years ago despite a boost in health funding. We had 34,600 in 2005 on elective surgery waiting lists; now there are more than 36,000 patients on waiting lists. We also have about the same number of public hospital beds compared to a decade ago, despite a massive spike in population. Was the government looking over the horizon then?

I want to refer to the government's own budget papers. In the Budget Strategy and Outlook 2008-09 on page 28 there is a graph that shows components of population growth as a four quarter rolling sum. It shows when the real growth in population was happening, a bigger growth than now, and that was in the late 1980s and early 1990s. I table that for the interest of members. Clearly there was this massive population growth happening then. Why was there no looking over the horizon then?

Tabled paper: Page 28 of the Budget Strategy and Outlook 2008-09 containing Chart 2.9, Components of Population Growth, Queensland.

In 1996 there were more than 10,000 beds to service three million people. Yet today we are only just recovering to that figure despite having boosted our population by more than one million. In 2007 the Productivity Commission's report on government services in Queensland had lower than national average number of beds per 1,000 head of population in regional and metropolitan areas for the third consecutive year. During the election campaign in 2006 the government promised over 1,300 beds for Queensland, but most of these are not due to come online until at least 2012.

I have already mentioned the aspect of population growth. Last year at estimates, and members may remember this, the honourable the minister, Stephen Robertson, admitted that there had been poor planning in Queensland Health in the past. He insisted that that had changed. He mentioned that it was due to planning not allowing for population growth. But when we look at this budget we see that there is another massive blow-out in capital works. There is \$300 million for the Gold Coast University Hospital, which I note is \$300 million extra but that was supposed to be the amount that was going to be saved by having moved the site. It was going to save that much money in transport infrastructure provision; now it has had to be provided for the university hospital. There is \$300 million extra for the Sunshine Coast hospital and \$350 million extra for the Queensland Children's Hospital. Right across the state there is evidence of the Labor government's failure to plan for population growth. Those opposite say that they are building tomorrow's Queensland today; they are building yesterday's Queensland but very slowly and expensively.

As for the future plans, the people of Queensland should judge a government on what it has done, not what it says it is going to do. A great example of that is the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program 2008 to 2026. I note that the cost of that infrastructure plan has blown out to \$107 billion. What has the government completed in the first three years of this plan? Projects worth \$3.3 billion. As I said, it is not what the government says it is going to; it is what has it actually done.

A new hospital is planned for the Gold Coast. That is appreciated, but not one sod of soil has been turned on the project, which is expected to be completed in 2012 when there is an acute problem now with maternity and mental health services on the Gold Coast. Members may remember that recently a woman in labour was forced to wait in a linen closet for three hours because no beds were available. There are other problems in Mackay, Townsville and Cairns—all of which were promised either new beds or new hospitals which are years off and in the meantime it is terrible for staff morale having to work in these places.

Mental health is an issue I want to refer to. Queensland Health has directed most of its mental health funding into acute hospital care at the expense of community based services. We know that mental health beds in hospitals are oversubscribed, meaning that people seeking psychiatric help are turned away from hospital because there are no beds available. I note too that the mental health plan promised to spend \$18 million in the financial year just ending but only about \$10 million was spent, so this next financial year the government is promising to spend \$9 million. So over two years it will end up spending what it said it was going to spend last year. That is why there is always this catch up.

I note that there was a question in the House yesterday to the honourable the health minister about the relocation of landowners and leaseholders affected by the development of the new university hospital at Parklands. In his answer the honourable the health minister mentioned the stakeholders, being the Church of Christ, the Salvation Army, Griffith University and a child-care centre. There was no mention made of the greyhound track, which is located within the Parklands area and administered by the Parklands Trust. I would like to ask the Treasurer if it is possible, as he has responsibility for racing, to ask the Greyhound Racing Authority to negotiate with the greyhound people at Parklands as they would like to have a temporary track placed within the trotting track as it is at Albion Park because when I asked a question on notice about what was happening with the plans to go to Logan I find there are no plans.

No plans for compensation have been made known to the people of Parklands. It would give them some certainty given that the trotting track has been given another seven to 10 years at that site. So, rather than having to move their meetings to Albion Park and Ipswich, it would be a great help to local greyhound owners and trainers—and I have expressed before that I am a shareholder in a dog, so I am interested in the industry as a whole, and I think it is important that the minister consider this and direct the Greyhound Racing Authority to negotiate with the Parklands Trust. Otherwise there is a good chance that the Logan track may not end up being provided and the greyhound people on the Gold Coast and in the south-east corner would obviously be adversely affected.

I want to speak about the private hospital blow-out scheme. I want to quote again from another article. I have more papers here than Kevin Rudd has in the federal parliament. I note that there was a column in the *Australian* the other day written by Henry Ergas, the Chairman of Concept Economics. When referring to the changes to private health insurance, he said—

Changing the arrangements for private health insurance, for example, may well make good sense. But it makes no sense at all to undermine its viability before having found a sustainable architecture for the health system, defined the role that private health insurance will play in that system and devised the means by which that role will be fulfilled.

It is for this reason that the changes to the Medicare levy surcharge were far worse than a mistake; they were a blunder.

But what did the minister say when the honourable Leader of the Opposition asked him what he is doing? He said, 'We're going to wait and see what the effect is.' Does that sound like looking over the horizon? It does not sound like that at all to me. It sounds like he does not know what is going to happen.

In the time left to me, I want to thank the Treasurer for funding for a new structure at Benowa State High School. There are three new schools announced for the coast, but I am concerned about the lack of maintenance resources for the older schools on the coast. Rapid transit on the Gold Coast seems to have fallen off the agenda. I note it is the second biggest infrastructure scheme on the Gold Coast, costing \$1.67 billion, but there are no plans for construction—only \$50 million for planning this year. Again, police numbers is something else other people have referred to, and we certainly need a significant number on the Gold Coast.

In conclusion, I am concerned that the government is stacking debt into government businesses and the general government sector like there is no tomorrow. Just as it is for average Queenslanders, if the mortgage gets too big, it is going to cost us in the long run. I implore the Premier and Treasurer to stop the high-taxing, high-borrowing, low-service delivery. It is back to the classroom for A+ Andrew—or 'Pitt the Younger', as I like to call him—and this assignment is marked 'must do better'.