



Speech by
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Hansard Thursday, 18 June 2009

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL;
INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT (ASSET RESTRUCTURING AND
DISPOSAL) BILL; FUEL SUBSIDY REPEAL AND REVENUE AND
OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

Mr PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (4.22 pm): I am proud to stand here today as a member of this government. We have had to make some tough decisions in bringing down this budget, but they are decisions that chart a course for Queensland's future. Let me first say that I am disappointed in today's response to the budget by the opposition—an opposition which daily finds new ways to express its negativity. But when it came time to lay their cards on the table, where were the ideas from the opposition members? Where was the plan, the blueprint, the framework for the future?

Those opposite will argue that they, too, are capable of making the tough decisions, because sometimes that is what you need to do when you are in government. But their idea of a tough decision—and who bears the brunt of those decisions—differs greatly from this government's. Let us take a moment to think about what they would do if they found themselves in a position where they had to take charge of the Queensland economy. What would they do if the buck stopped with them? What would they do? They would sack people; that is what they would do. They would bring the building program to a grinding halt, raise taxes and cut vital community programs. They would shut up shop faster than No. 4, race 7 at the dishlickers on a Saturday night. In a vain attempt to emulate the approach taken by the pin-up boys of conservative fiscal policy in Western Australia, they would rather axe thousands of jobs, regardless of the human cost, in an effort to bring the budget into surplus overnight and score some short-term political points—just so they can put their hand on their heart and say, 'Not on my watch.'

The Treasurer has delivered a responsible budget that makes one thing abundantly clear: this government values jobs. We have put the needs of people ahead of political expediency. In Far North Queensland, the budget demonstrates that we are getting on with the job by continuing our building program that is creating jobs and supporting demand through projects of regional significance, such as the continued redevelopment of the Cairns Base Hospital and the completion of a replacement 275kV transmission line between Innisfail and Edmonton to ensure a secure and reliable high-voltage electricity supply to the Far North.

In Mulgrave, continuation of a number of local infrastructure projects will protect and create hundreds of jobs in the community. In education, \$19.2 million has been released to complete the \$36.7 million Innisfail State College, and more than half a million dollars in minor works will be carried out in state schools at places including Aloomba, Babinda, Bellenden Ker, Bentley Park, Daradgee, Flying Fish Point, Miriwinni and White Rock. Other examples include the \$8.68 million for the construction of the new Yarrabah Primary Health Care Centre at a total cost of \$15.77 million or the combined \$4 million towards the Edmonton and Southern waste water treatment plants.

There has also been significant investment in social housing across the state, including \$3.4 million to commence construction of 13 homes in Mulgrave. Low-income social housing applicants with a severe

and immediate housing need will also have access to short- to medium-term accommodation through Innisfail Youth and Family Care, thanks to \$215,000 under the Community Rent Scheme.

Projects that are part of our program of Main Roads capital works will also be maintained. On the Bruce Highway between Innisfail and Cairns north of Blundell Road, \$1.64 million and \$0.75 million in federal funding will allow drainage improvements and an asphalt overlay to be completed. Other works include upgrades to the Yarrabah access road, replacement of a bridge on a section of Hussey Road at Edmonton, and \$1 million to complete replacement of a floodway at Hemming Creek on the Gillies Highway near Gordonvale.

I know that residents in the southern suburbs of Cairns will be pleased that \$1.35 million in state and federal funding has been allocated to complete concept planning between Ray Jones Drive and Sheehy Road. It means that we are one step closer to addressing traffic congestion on the Bruce Highway.

I have been working hard to secure a new ambulance station for Gordonvale. It was one of my highest priorities at the last election and I am pleased that the first \$200,000 investment in this project has been announced. The total spend of \$1.8 million is a significant investment in community safety for the Gordonvale area. The existing Gordonvale Ambulance Station is over 50 years old and, as the population in and around Gordonvale continues to grow, existing services will be placed under increased stress and the complement of paramedics required to service the local population will outgrow the current facility.

In light of population growth on the western side of the Bruce Highway and the need to service call-outs associated with motor vehicle accidents on the highway, the location of the new station must be carefully considered. While there is still some detail to be worked out in terms of where it will be positioned, I can assure residents that the Cliff Trembath Memorial Training Room, which plays a valuable role within our community, will form part of any new centre.

The other pleasing outcome is confirmation of the additional \$6 million committed during the election towards replacement of the Jubilee Bridge in Innisfail, bringing the state government's commitment to \$12 million for this project. The Cassowary Coast Regional Council is working with the Department of Transport and Main Roads to finalise an overall cost estimate for the project, and I am continuing to lobby the federal government for the remaining funds.

Despite the measures outlined in the budget to create and sustain jobs, unemployment is expected to reach 6.5 per cent in 2009-10 and 7.25 per cent in 2010-11. In the Far North, this figure is already in double digits. This will put enormous pressure on services and enormous pressure on working families. This is why the Bligh government's investment not only in the building program but also in training and community support services is so important.

Before the economic downturn, the public and private sectors alike were facing a skills shortage on a grand scale. Another great feature of this budget is its investment in training, with \$414 million for 150,000 new training places to ensure we have the skilled workers we need when the economic upswing happens. In Far North Queensland, \$66.51 million has been committed for vocational education and training activity to underpin the social and economic development of the region—with \$4.93 million across the Far North under Skilling Queenslanders for Work, including \$584,000 to provide accredited training to low-skilled workers.

This budget also delivers on election promises from 1 July, with the Payroll Tax Incentive Scheme that rightly rewards those businesses that take on and continue to employ trainees with a 125 per cent payroll tax rebate. In addition, Green Army work placements and traineeships are expected to create around 660 jobs for young people in the Far North.

As the Treasurer stated, the single biggest allocation of additional resources in the budget is \$414 million over four years to community sector workers who care for and support some of our most vulnerable Queenslanders—the frail elderly, the disabled and the unwell. I would like to acknowledge the significant investment in Mulgrave for community services providing vital frontline support for families, such as counselling, early intervention and specialist support services. This is the sign of a Labor government doing what it does best—caring for those who need help the most.

I am aware that there are some areas across the state that have had some of their commitments or projects postponed for a period—some indefinitely—as a result of the budget bottom line. From my reading of the budget papers, I have not seen evidence of this in Mulgrave, and I am thankful for that.

I campaigned on a number of priorities, and just because some of these have not been funded in this budget does not change my resolve to continue to present a case for them. I want the people of Mulgrave to rest assured that I will continue to look under every rock for possible funding sources. This is what I have been elected to do. Yes, economic circumstances are bleak, but there is cause for some optimism. This is a budget that reinforces the Bligh government's determination to govern for all Queenslanders and lays the foundation for returning the budget to surplus to build a positive future for this great state.