



Speech by

Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

Hansard Thursday, 10 June 2010

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr POWELL (Glass House—LNP) (7.36 pm): This evening I rise to contribute to the cognate debate on the appropriation and revenue amendment bills. For the people of Glass House, there are mixed emotions upon reading the bills. For most of the many communities and townships in the electorate there is something to be thankful for. Equally, there is disappointment at some glaring local omissions, and as we look beyond the local and explore the broader budget implications things get downright depressing. So for the people of Glass House this budget is an example of the good, the bad and the ugly. For the sake of beginning on a positive note, I would like to unpack the good news for Glass House in a bit more detail.

For the residents of Caboolture and Elimbah, there is a bit to crow about. The Caboolture Hospital's emergency department will continue its upgrade. Apparently, although I have not been able to source this myself and I have to take it on good advice from a government member, \$500,000 will be put towards planning the Caboolture health hub as well. The state makes another \$1.09 million contribution to the \$11 million State Equestrian Centre just north of the Caboolture showgrounds. Just a little further up the road, the state is chipping in \$34,375 from its Environmental Infrastructure Program as part of the \$550,000 landfill gas extraction project at Alex Barr Oval. I know the countless volunteers at the adjacent Caboolture Historical Village are watching that project with interest. A little further north there is \$100,000 in Safer Roads Sooner funding for shoulder widening and sealing of Beerburrum Road south of Spoonbill Drive.

Whilst applauded by some, others in the area will scratch their heads in wonderment at the share of \$15.5 million being invested locally as part of the koala response strategy. On that note, while I support moves to identify, protect and rehabilitate koala habitat in the area, I would call on the relevant departments to get out from behind their computer screens and satellite photographs and go and check things out on the ground. I am no koala expert but I am pretty certain koalas are not really fussed on either the leaves or the nuts of macadamia trees and yet macadamia farms continue to be mapped as prime koala habitat.

If we move west to Wamuran, D'Aguiar, Delaneys Creek, Woodford and Mount Mee, to the best of my knowledge, and from a detailed study of the budget papers and websites, these communities miss out altogether. But, sorry, I was trying to be positive.

Moving north to the townships of Beerburrum, Glass House Mountains, Beerwah and Peachester, it is happier news. The 2010-11 financial year will see \$1.5 million going towards the Johnston Road-Bruce Highway interchange. That is welcome, but locals do have questions about why, especially when just up the highway the Roys Road intersection is far more dangerous and in need of far more urgent attention. The Beerburrum State School gets a well-deserved \$48,500 through the TIDS program to improve its set-down area and parking.

If we continue north to the Blackall Range and the communities of Maleny, Montville, Flaxton and Conondale there is a bit more to cheer about again. The previously announced \$403,000 for the Maleny State School upgrades is welcome, as is the \$225,000 under the Safer Roads Sooner program to make improvements on the Maleny-Stanley River Road at Postman's Track. There is \$98,000 to finalise the

planning study on the Maleny-Kenilworth Road north of Conondale, \$75,000 to begin the replacement of two walking bridges at Kondalilla Falls and \$15,000 towards bus shelters at Conondale State School.

Finally, for the towns of the Sunshine Valley—Palmwoods, Chevallum and Eudlo—parents of school-age children can rejoice. There is \$1.9 million to construct a new administration building and convert the old administration building to classrooms, \$565,000 to commence stage 1 of classroom upgrades and \$71,000 to commence stage 2 of classroom upgrades—all at Palmwoods State School.

More broadly, whilst the details are very light on, I do hope the electorate will benefit from increased investments in existing national park infrastructure and in the acquisition of more protected land. As I have said before, the Glass House electorate strategically connects the D'Aguilar National Park, the Glass House Mountains National Park and the national parks of the Blackall Range.

Deliberate investment and acquisitions in this area could deliver an uninterrupted nature corridor stretching from Brisbane's northern suburbs to the Noosa hinterland. As I mentioned in passing to the Acting Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability yesterday, following the travesty that was the sale of Forestry Plantations Queensland—a sale that included land adjacent to those national parks I just mentioned and land perfectly suited for acquisition—such purchases would demonstrate a commitment by this government to maintain the green corridor that lies between Caboolture and Caloundra. But then I guess it would only go again to demonstrate how incompetent this government is because it would probably wind up purchasing the land back from Hancocks for far more than it sold it to Hancocks for in the first place.

I also hope in response to my representations in this House that we will see a local increase in police numbers as part of the investment in more than 200 new police officers across the state. I understand two positions at Maleny were advertised just last week. That is truly great news for hinterland locals, but, more importantly, for the hardworking officers already stationed at Maleny. But I would suggest again that Palmwoods and Woodford also need additional staffing. I eagerly await announcements that these services will be boosted in the very near future.

The people in the north of the electorate may take some solace—although admittedly not much—from the increased investment in Nambour and Caloundra hospitals to take up the slack of the ongoing delays around constructing the public component of the new Sunshine Coast University Hospital.

As I said, this budget is about the good, the bad and the ugly. So let us look at the bad. The bad refers to the omission of some seriously significant community priorities—commitments like the D'Aguilar Highway, the Caboolture health hub, the Beerburum to Nambour rail duplication, the Maleny-Kenilworth Road and, less costly but equally important, an Elimbah State School crossing supervisor and operational funding for the Maleny Neighbourhood Centre.

Let us start with the D'Aguilar Highway. It is clear that with no allocation of funding for 2010-11 the state is hanging its hopes on the black spot funding application currently sitting with the federal government. I and the local community must clearly peg our hopes for any immediate improvements to this killer highway on that same funding. As the state MP responsible for this state controlled road, I do wonder whether this government has conveniently abdicated its responsibility to upgrade this highway to its Commonwealth colleagues.

I will ask, therefore, in light of no additional funding for the highway, that the minister show jolly common sense and overrule the manual of uniform traffic control devices—the MUTCD—and move some speed limit signage. I think particularly of the 80 kilometres per hour sign that currently sits outside the Wamuran veterinarian practice. If there are no upgrades to the highway, this speed limit sign must be moved to the other side of County Drive and Turnbull Road. It will not even cost the government a cent. Please, minister, do not let it take a fatality to intervene in this lunacy.

Then there is the Caboolture health hub. I did mention I have heard rumours that \$500,000 has been allocated towards planning the hub. But planning is not bricks and mortar. We first heard about the Caboolture health hub back in the 2006-07 budget. But back then it was referred to as the Caboolture Ambulatory and Community Health Centre—a supposed \$20 million project designed to integrate acute health care, primary care and other non-government services. In that budget, \$1.58 million was set aside to purchase land for the centre. But we have not heard boo since.

'So what,' you well may say. We have this year seen the consequences—the very human consequences—of this failed project. The Children's Therapy Service, currently based on the ground floor of the Caboolture Hospital, was one of those primary care services slated to move into the health hub. With the unexplained delay to the development of the hub, the CTS has had to source a new location, and North Lakes has been selected.

Let me tell people what that means for Kirsty Melton of Elimbah and her kids, Lachlan, aged four, and Rachael, aged 22 months, both of whom use the CTS for speech therapy services. I refer to an article in the *Caboolture News* dated Wednesday, 19 May. It states—

When Lachlan starts prep next year, she

Kirsty Melton—

will need to travel for an epic four hours on public transport within school times to take Rachael to half-hour long appointments at the new centre.

"I do not drive much and would need to take public transport so if I take the 9.20 am to Caboolture station, then a bus to Rothwell and then swap to get to Westfield North Lakes, I then have a 250-metre walk up a hill to the North Lakes health hub with two kids," Kirsty said.

"This is not only a costly exercise for families, but the main issue they will face is after the travelling to get to the new location, their special little ones are going to either be weary from travel, grumpy or asleep. This would then make the therapy session useless.

I have visited the Caboolture CTS and will shortly be shown around the new North Lakes facilities. I have no doubt that, by the time it opens, there may well be a superior service offered at the new North Lakes site. But none of that will make it easier for parents like Kirsty or kids like Lachlan and Rachael, who must now commute a four-hour round trip from Caboolture. The most frustrating thing is that all of this could have been avoided had the hub progressed at pace, allowing the CTS to move into a new Caboolture space. Instead we have heard deafening silence on the matter since 2006.

Another omission is the Beerburrum to Nambour rail duplication. For towns like Palmwoods and Eudlo that are relying on this project proceeding sooner rather than later so they can get about redesigning town centres and addressing critical traffic concerns, the ongoing neglect of this project is devastating. While Springfield gets its rail infrastructure two years early, our main northern rail corridor remains in limbo. I do not want to deny the residents of Springfield their much needed public transport infrastructure, but surely upgrading a significant passenger and freight route should share similar priority.

We could say the same of the Maleny-Kenilworth Road. I mentioned \$98,000 to finish the planning study. Seriously, enough with the planning. This is a major thoroughfare for residents around Maleny and in the northern Mary Valley, not to mention a gazetted tourist route. I call again on the Minister for Main Roads to address this, particularly the goat track north of Conondale and Witta Hill, in his next RIP.

Finally, to summarise the bad in this budget, let me mention just two more omissions. I can see no mention of the \$15,000 sought by the Elimbah State School P&C to install a crossing supervisor on Beerburrum Road, but I will address this in more detail later this evening, and nor can I see any operational funding for the Maleny Neighbourhood Centre. Who in their right mind builds a \$2 million community facility then neglects to provide even a minimal amount for its management and overheads? Sheer madness!

Throughout my analysis of where this government has neglected the constituents of Glass House we may have heard members opposite ask how we will fund it. Quite simply through canning the absurd Northern Pipeline Interconnector stage 2, or NPI2. This government has already wasted \$200 million on this pipeline to nowhere now that Traveston Dam has been confined to the rubbish bin where it belongs, taking with it another \$225 million of taxpayers' money. This coming year this government is going to waste another \$200 million on this pipeline. As an interesting but related aside, I was reading an article in today's *Melbourne Age* titled 'Brumby water plan damned' which states—

THE Brumby government's signature water saving projects were implemented without proper costings and without evidence that they were feasible, the Auditor-General has found.

In a damning critique of the \$2 billion 'food bowl' modernisation and the \$750 million north-south pipeline, the auditor found Labor had failed to demonstrate the need for the expenditure and to properly explore alternatives.

The report will add to the pressure on the government over its handling of major projects in the lead-up to the November state election.

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The state opposition claimed the auditor's report as vindication of its long-standing criticism of the projects and called for an independent judicial inquiry. Country water resources spokesman Peter Walsh described the food bowl modernisation and pipeline as 'ill-conceived projects planned by a panicked government which, for 10 years, had failed to plan for Victoria's water needs'.

That sounds awfully familiar, doesn't it? It appears this government, the Bligh Labor government, is not the only Labor government in this nation determined to waste taxpayers' dollars on pipedreams.

Which brings me to the ugly. All members on this side of the House have addressed the broader budget implications, beginning with the Leader of the Opposition's budget reply this morning. All have spoken about debt, mismanagement, dishonesty and the spiralling cost of living. Let me briefly touch on an issue dear to my heart, an issue that demonstrates that dishonesty. Prior to the last election the opposition put forward a cost-saving policy of public sector efficiency dividends. But thanks to an unrelenting spin campaign by the Bligh government, 'efficiency dividend' magically became 'slashing 12,000 front-line jobs'—a complete and utter fabrication. The truth is the government was proposing an efficiency dividend of its own, and the Treasurer confirmed it in his budget speech earlier this week when he said—

Last year an efficiency dividend was introduced across government and harvested upfront. This has required agencies to look at expenditure and make savings in their operations.

As reported in an article in yesterday's *Australian* titled 'Public wage bill heads for blowout'—

The cost of paying wages, holiday pay and long-service leave to the public service is soaring despite a decree that the bureaucracy squeeze \$337 million in 'efficiency savings' during this financial year—cost-cutting that will grow to \$451m by the 2012-13 financial year.

The Bligh government has also ordered that any growth in the public-sector workforce be limited to 'front-line service delivery' and 'targeted policy commitments'.

Fascinating! Apparently as the opposition originally proposed, it is possible to implement an efficiency dividend within the public sector that can deliver tangible savings whilst not impacting on front-line service delivery or targeted policy commitments. Queenslanders should take note of this. Queensland's public servants should take note of this. As a former public servant, I can confirm savings can be made—efficiencies can be made—within the public sector without impacting on front-line service delivery, which is why the Leader of the Opposition gave the commitment this morning that where savings are made from reducing overlapping bureaucracy in the EPA and offices of Clean Energy and Climate Change the funds will be used to directly employ additional on-the-ground staff in areas such as our national parks. It is possible to deliver efficiency dividends whilst protecting, even enhancing, front-line service delivery.

As I conclude let me use someone else's words to confirm the opposition is accurately reflecting the concerns of broader Queensland. I refer to an article in yesterday's *Australian* titled 'Leading lights like horses in blinkers' written by Sean Parnell which states—

This fifth-term Labor government remains on track, vowing to stimulate the economy for at least another year before wrapping up its major structural reforms.

But politically, there is a risk the Premier and Treasurer are so focused on the finish line that they can no longer tell whether the crowd is still cheering or whether the election race has already been lost. No government can push ahead without having the public behind it.

The structural reforms kicked off last year with the abolition of a fuel subsidy, and another round of vehicle registration increases. Yet this budget only delivers the relief of a \$24 maximum cut to compulsory third party insurance premiums—less than 47c a week, funded by the abolition of trader commissions and the HIH levy.

Electricity price hikes continue to put a cloud over the previous decision to privatise power retailers. Yet this budget only offers pensioners and seniors a \$26 rebate increase ...

Increases to the cost of living, including mortgages repayments, are hurting households, perhaps best illustrated by poker machine revenue decreasing for the first time.

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Ultimately, this budget does nothing to convince Queenslanders of the merits of the government's economic strategy.

Cash-strapped households may already resent Labor for running its own race, not theirs. The danger for Bligh and Fraser is that they may not be in a position to share the spoils of victory after the 2012 election.

I add a hearty 'hear, hear' to that.

Other than the increase in the electricity rebate for pensioners, the cost of living increases hurting all of us remain unaddressed and unacknowledged. Everyone is paying more for registration, fuel, tolls, public transport, electricity and water, with no relief in sight. Whilst the good local investments are appreciated, they do not make up for the bad local oversights and they certainly fail to compensate for the ugly economic state this government has got Queensland into.