



Speech by
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Hansard Friday, 11 June 2010

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

Mr PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (6.10 pm): It has long been said that regional members of parliament from across the political spectrum sometimes need to yell a little louder to be heard. Well, the Premier and the Treasurer have listened. The 2010-11 state budget delivers for regional Queensland and for the Far North. More than 57 per cent of our record-breaking building program is to areas outside South-East Queensland, with over \$990 million being spent across our region. This year the capital spend per person in Far North Queensland is \$3,591, above that of \$3,588 in Brisbane, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast. We are investing more than \$1.3 billion in road projects outside the south-east corner and the government's mini-stimulus package for the housing construction industry—the regional first home owner grant increase to \$11,000—will also provide a boost.

One of the defining characteristics of the Queensland economy is that no two regions are the same. The impact of the global financial crisis has not been uniform across the state. There is no doubt that the Far North has done it tougher than most in recent times. Employment in the Cairns area declined, seeing our region record the sharpest increase in the unemployment rate in the year. Last year, along with elected representatives from the local, state and federal level, I stood shoulder to shoulder with Advance Cairns, the Cairns Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Tropical North Queensland on the need to secure a new deal for the Far North. The response from the Bligh government was the Cairns Economic Future plan, a \$116 million package for our region designed to jump-start the economy. Several of these initiatives have been delivered in this budget. There is a lot to be said for the business community and elected representatives working together. We need to remember that great things for our region can be achieved by doing so.

Along with the members for Cairns, Barron River and Cook, I took our case to the Premier and the Treasurer. I sincerely thank them for listening and recognising that our region needed special consideration due to the tough circumstances. It is clear that, while our local tourism industry must continue to be supported, we cannot continue to rely on it to deliver. We must build on areas of success, such as education, and continue to develop our tropical expertise. We need to continue to make linkages with Papua New Guinea and we need genuine regional approaches to investment, tendering and training to secure outcomes for the Far North. Despite a two per cent fall last month, the Far North still faces an unemployment level well above the state average and there is still more to be done. One of the highlights of this budget for our region is the firm commitment from the state government to be an equal partner with Cairns Regional Council and the federal government to develop the Cairns Cultural Precinct in Far North Queensland. The state budget makes a \$42.5 million contribution to the project consisting of a transfer of the state owned port land valued at \$40 million and \$2.5 million as a one-third contribution of funding for detailed planning of the project. Of the project, chairman of Advance Cairns Russell Beer said—

It will provide a much needed boost to the region's economy in these troubled times by creating immediate and ongoing jobs. This will be a transformational project for our region.

This is an important step towards diversifying the region's economic base. It will provide a people's meeting place, fulfilling the vision of a waterfront precinct that our city has held for many years.

The cultural precinct will be a multipurpose facility. It will have a practical component that builds on our strengths in the local economy, adding exhibition space to increase our ability to attract convention delegates in greater numbers than our current capacity allows. Maybe we will see headline Australian bands like AC/DC or international artists such as U2 or Pink not only visit Port Douglas for a holiday but hold a major concert in Cairns as well. The Bligh Labor government has committed to this project for the long-term benefit of our region and I trust that the federal government will join with us and make it a reality.

I seek the leave of the House to have the remainder of my speech incorporated in *Hansard*. I have the approval of the Deputy Speaker.

Leave granted.

LOCAL JOBS LAY THE FOUNDATION FOR RECOVERY

In the Mulgrave electorate, there are more than \$80 million (\$80,909,400) worth of initiatives allocated in this year's budget. And this doesn't include those other budget initiatives that are of regional significance such as the Cairns Cultural Precinct, and other projects that benefit workers and their families in Mulgrave.

This figure is made up of many small parts, but every little bit counts with the current economic situation being what it is.

Funding has been allocated in this year's Budget to build and repair social housing, upgrade level crossings and spruce up local schools in Mulgrave, creating jobs and building on the foundations for economic recovery.

My old primary school, Gordonvale State School, will see funding of \$28,000 allocated for maintenance work. Science labs at Babinda State School will be renewed and more than \$1.1 million has been allocated to refresh classrooms at Hambledon and Yarrabah state schools.

As part of the largest investment in social housing since the Chifley era, almost \$10 million has been allocated for projects in Mulgrave including \$3.4 million to complete the construction of 20 single bedroom dwellings at Edmonton.

The remaining \$8 million towards the construction of a replacement Jubilee Bridge brings the State's contribution to \$14 million. On this basis, Cassowary Coast Regional Council has now given the project the green light and it's expected to generate up to 140 jobs in the region.

More than three-quarters of a million dollars (\$775,000) will also be provided this year to complete the \$10 million project to upgrade level crossings between Farleigh and Garradunga.

In terms of community safety, this year's budget fulfils an election commitment with \$1.9 million to construct a replacement ambulance station at Gordonvale which, after community consultation last year, will be co-located at the Gordonvale Memorial Hospital. It's anticipated that construction will start before the end of 2010 and the station completed by the middle of 2011.

I'm pleased to see \$26.7 million in subsidies allocated to Cassowary Coast Regional Council in order to upgrade the sewage treatment plant, as part of the \$40.4 million previously announced as part of the Cairns Economic Future plan.

I also welcome confirmation of \$5.7 million to assist Cassowary Coast Regional Council with the upgrade of the Innisfail water treatment plant. The upgrade will help Council ensure it has the infrastructure necessary to protect the Great Barrier Reef and meet the demands of future growth.

Also on the Cassowary Coast, I'm sure that the Member for Hinchinbrook joins with me in welcoming the allocation of \$226,000 for a proposed commercial fishing facility at Mourilyan Harbour—an important port for the Far North's commercial fishing industry. I am meeting with representatives from Ports North next week to seek further information on this project but a go-ahead for construction would mean jobs in the local economy.

Looking north, there's plenty of good news in the budget for Cape York communities too, which in turn means good news for Cairns. More than \$50 million to build new bridges, roads, police stations and educational facilities will provide job opportunities for Cairns-based tradespeople.

All of these projects will play a significant role in creating jobs and helping support the Far North's economic recovery.

INDUSTRIAL LAND AND FUTURE EMPLOYMENT HUBS

This year the Department of Infrastructure and Planning has completed the Far North Queensland Industrial Land Study and secured industrial land in Cairns through the Mount Peter Master Planning Project. And there's also \$1.4 million in the budget as a first step to increase the industrial land capacity in the region, with a total commitment of \$8 million.

This is good strategic planning and complements proposed private sector projects like the master-planned Edmonton Business and Industry Park. This project alone would reportedly create up to 4,000 jobs during the construction phase, plus a similar number ongoing, and provide a major catalyst for local employment.

I've been a strong advocate for the Edmonton Business and Industry Park and I know there is general support for it within Government.

But this shovel-ready project is a good example of low-hanging fruit that is languishing on the vine. We need to find a way to fast-track this project for the good of our entire Far North Queensland region and give a shot in the arm for investor confidence.

SKILLS AND TRAINING

Under the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program, \$95.7 million has been allocated to the Far North for vocational education and training—including apprenticeships and traineeships—and \$10.8 million to deliver new job creation programs and grow a skilled workforce

We're also providing \$5.14 million to assist low skilled workers, those disadvantaged in the labour market and to support the Queensland Green Army strategy, and more than \$1 million to deliver training to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional and remote areas of Queensland.

ROADS AND TRANSPORT

I've already mentioned the \$8 million commitment to the construction of a new Jubilee Bridge in Innisfail, but the other big ticket roads item in the budget for Mulgrave relates to the Bruce Highway Upgrade Project.

The first \$20 million in federal funding has been allocated for overpasses between Sheehy Road and Ray Jones Drive, with a total federal government contribution of \$150 million.

When door knocking during the 2009 election campaign, I was left in no doubt that residents in the southern corridor of Cairns wanted to see action on the Bruce Highway. In my subsequent discussions at street stalls and constituent meetings I have no reason to believe that the general public support for upgrading the existing transport corridor has diminished.

Proponents of a second corridor option via East Trinity know that such an option would provide no benefit to those people living north of Wrights Creek as they would not have direct access to the second corridor.

It is people living in White Rock, Mount Sheridan, Bentley Park and Edmonton who make up more than two thirds of total traffic and are bearing the brunt of traffic congestion problems. A second corridor would not alleviate this congestion so the existing corridor would still need to be upgraded. I'm proud to be working in partnership with Federal Member for Leichhardt Jim Turnour on this project of regional significance.

There are also plenty of smaller roads related projects to be delivered between Cairns and Innisfail, as well as over to Yarrabah that are funded by this budget. Packaged together, they are worth almost \$1 million.

Use of public transport in our region is also on the rise. In 2009, more than 3.5 million bus trips were made in Cairns—the same as the number of passengers through the Cairns International Airport over the same period. This budget subsidises the cost of all of the public transport services provided by Marlin Coast Sunbus in the Cairns region (\$7,867,913) and by TransNorth to Innisfail and surrounding areas (\$239,142).

For those people who continue to own and maintain a car, our changes to CTP insurance will save money. Preventing motor dealers from receiving commissions will reduce costs by around \$24. This may seem like a small amount to some, but people doing it tough know that every little bit counts.

HEALTH

Most people would be aware that the Cairns Base Hospital is undergoing a \$446.3 million redevelopment to be completed by 2014. This budget provides the next \$80 million of that project, as well as \$5.6 million to complete the \$12.7 million Cairns Central Community Health Centre.

But the Cairns Base hospital site is constrained and is expected to run out of room in coming years.

The location of future health facilities in the region was one of my top priorities at the last election and I made it clear that Labor will also invest in a major health facility in the southern suburbs of Cairns. A short-listing process for potential sites is well advanced, with confidential negotiations underway.

I'm very keen for a decision on this issue as I know it will put many people's mind at rest and provide some certainty that the southern suburbs are not being forgotten when it comes to the future health needs of our region.

It's important that the location can be easily accessed by as many residents as possible, which means aligning site selection with planning for the Bruce Highway upgrade and Cairns Transit Network projects.

The opportunity also exists for a private health facility to be constructed to complement the government's plans. Add into the mix the GP Super Clinic near Sugarworld and the future health picture for the southern corridor looks bright.

In last year's budget, we secured the final \$15.77 million to complete the primary health care facility at Yarrabah. I was pleased to recently take a walk through and was most impressed.

Last week, I joined the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health Paul Lucas to meet with representatives from Gurriny Yealamucka Health Services. Gurriny will be colocated with Queensland Health in this facility and are funded in this year's budget to the tune of \$198,000 to provide Clinical Services and Health.

While there are still some staff transitional issues to work through, Gurriny is a shining example of how community controlled health initiatives can work and improve the lives of aboriginal people.

It's also worth noting that Queensland Health recognises that 'who' delivers the health service can make a real difference. Having a female doctor available usually sees an enormous influx of female community members accessing health services. And of course it's also important to see Indigenous health workers in key roles, not only to provide culturally sensitive health care, but to provide good role models for young people in the community to look up to.

A HELPING HAND FOR THOSE WHO NEED IT MOST

I'm proud of this budget which delivers on Labor's promise to create more jobs, sooner. It not only focuses on regional Queensland, but has a strong emphasis on continuing to deliver support services to some of the most vulnerable people in our region. It is a budget for the times.

We took the tough decisions as a government to ensure we could continue to see jobs growth, but also to support those in our community who needed our help.

We all know that financial pressures can lead to an increase in domestic violence. This budget includes funding of \$330,202 towards an accommodation and support service for women and children escaping domestic and family violence, with a total State Government contribution of \$990,606.

Young people at risk of homelessness will be able to access \$359,987 in counselling and support services with a total State Government contribution of \$1.08 million.

Over half a million dollars will be spent to provide early intervention support for children with autism and their families. Younger people with disabilities will be supported to exit or be diverted from entering aged care facilities with funding of \$1.43 million. And there's more than half a million in Home and Community Care (HACC) funding to support communities in Innisfail and Babinda.

The Queensland Government is committed to helping ease cost of living pressures on working families, pensioners and Queenslanders doing it tough. Working families are supported, with \$15,525 made available to increase coordinator hours and

enhance program preparation for Outside School Hours Care services at the Innisfail PCYC, Good Counsel Primary School, and St Michael's Gordonvale.

There are already several initiatives to assist with rising electricity prices, particularly for pensioners. We've already increased the rebate available to \$190 per year, and from 1 July this year it will increase to around \$216.

I wanted to particularly mention a new Medical Cooling and Heating Electricity Commission Scheme that will provide a rebate to assist with the electricity costs for eligible concession card holders with a medical condition who have a dependence on air-conditioning to regulate body temperature, such as those suffering from Multiple Sclerosis.

Queensland Council of Social Services (QCROSS) President Karyn Walsh welcomed the announcement and said heat-sensitive patients, most on low incomes, would have been devastated by the expected price rise on 1 July unless something was done.

All of these initiatives show a Labor Government doing what it does best—caring for those who need help the most.

THE EARLY YEARS ARE IMPORTANT

We know that access to quality early childhood programs are critical in order to help give our kids a flying start in life.

This year residents in Mulgrave will benefit from new kindergarten services as part of the government's pilot program to subsidise long-day-care centres.

The ABC Learning Centre at Tamarind Gardens will receive \$22,725 to offer kindergarten programs taught by qualified teachers as part of the government's commitment to universal access—at a total cost of \$68,175.

Having a kindergarten program combined with the convenience of long day care will be great for working parents who want their children to access quality early education. I know the extra services will be welcomed by parents in this fast-growing area.

The budget papers also flag the construction of an early years centre in the Cairns region to commence services in 2011. The centre would provide integrated early childhood education and care, family support and child and family health services.

Population growth will continue strongly, growth will fuel demand for early childhood education, child-care, and other services—including more kindergartens.

I'll certainly be presenting a strong case to have this Early Years Centre considered for the growing southern corridor, and for us to get our fair share of the accelerated kindergarten program.

ECONOMIC STRATEGIES ARE POLES APART

The Opposition Leader's response to the budget was light on detail to say the least. As expected, it was a case of 'Magic Pudding' economics. The LNP has no plan and no solutions—and certainly no income stream to speak of.

During the budget debate I've heard several Liberal-National MPs who on the one hand opposed our capital program, but proudly boasted about the projects that were being built in their electorates. Not satisfied, they continue to ask for more and more yet are unable or unwilling to see that initiatives cost money.

Again they take the path of least political resistance, and again demonstrate their duplicity. Their lack of a plan takes us further away from regaining a AAA credit rating, not closer.

How will they pay for their promises, what they cost, where will the money come from, what taxes will they raise and what programs would they cut? In order to deliver on any of their promises, the LNP would need to do one of two things.

They'd need to put in a place a capital works freeze and in the process noble thousands of hard working men and women who've kept their jobs or gained employment as a result of Labor's building program.

Alternatively, they'd slug Queenslanders already doing it tough by massively increasing taxes and charges.

Make no mistake, the only thing the LNP stands for is job cuts.

Labor understands that behind these jobs are working families and the last thing Queenslanders need in tough times is to lose the dignity of work and the ability to put food on the table for their family.

ASSET SALES STILL NEEDED

We're in a better position than forecast last year, and while we are recovering, the sale of the five commercial businesses is still needed in order for us to attain our goal to return to a AAA credit rating.

The assets for sale would require a considerable injection of funds for upgrade and maintenance in future years. That is money that will need to be borrowed, that cannot be invested in infrastructure to keep pace with state population growing by 2,000 people a week. We need more, not less.

Schools, roads, hospitals, ambulance, police and fire stations will be the legacy of this government's preparedness to make the hard decisions during tough times.

Unlike the Opposition, we have a plan and we've stuck to that plan. It's a responsible economic strategy that is protecting jobs and building the infrastructure we need for a stronger future.

CONCLUSION

Job figures released this week show that Queensland has generated jobs for the tenth month in a row with 8,800 new jobs.

Our jobs target started out last year at 100,000 and today stands at 50,700. Even in the worst of economic times we are half way towards the commitment we gave at the last election.

Queenslanders were promised a strong economic plan for the future and this Budget delivered on that promise.