



Speech by

Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Friday, 11 June 2010

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

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—Ind) (3.20 pm): I am very honoured to be able to stand in this democratic chamber as the Independent member for Burnett and deliver a speech on our budget comprising our cognate appropriation bills during the 150th birthday celebrations of our state. Before I comment on the detail of the budget and how the budget will affect the people of the Burnett, I acknowledge the great loss this state and nation has recently experienced. Two members of the Australian Defence Force, Sapper Darren Smith and Sapper Jacob Moerland, on their first deployment to Afghanistan, have been killed by a bomb in the Army's worst combat loss in a single day since the Vietnam War. Killed with Sapper Darren Smith was his bomb detection dog, Herbie.

As members of this place we sometimes forget about the amount of blood that has been shed and what has been suffered and endured by brave Australians and Queenslanders such as Darren and Jacob and their families in order to allow us the freedom to speak in this place on behalf of our constituents. Today I would like to thank all serving members of the Defence Force and past members and their families for enduring the unendurable and suffering the unspeakable so that Queenslanders might live free. On behalf of the people of Burnett and my family, I extend my deepest sympathies to the families and friends of Sapper Darren Smith and Sapper Jacob Moerland.

The 2010-11 Queensland state budget has been delivered in a time of world and nationwide economic uncertainty. The world is still in danger of sliding back into recession. The world's most respected current affairs magazine, *The Economist*, recently had a picture of a shark's fin with the headline, 'Fear returns—How to avoid a double dip recession'. While the rest of the world's leaders are doing everything they can to recession proof their countries' economies, the Prime Minister of Australia is behaving irresponsibly. He is deliberately creating confusion in the mining industry which has protected our economy from the worst of the effects of the global financial crisis. Why?

I would like to be able to say it is because he wants a better future for the Australian worker, but every worker or small business owner I have spoken to who relies on the mining industry to feed their family and put a roof over their head—and there are many in the electorate of Burnett—are aghast at his behaviour. One large Burnett business wiped five per cent off its projected turnover for the coming year because of Mr Rudd's mining super tax. Mr Rudd is protecting only one person's livelihood and that is his own. His actions are designed to take the focus away from his many political shortcomings.

It is vitally important that every member of this House tells Kevin Rudd that his mining industry super tax is a blatant takeover of the Queensland mining industry and places in jeopardy the mining royalties received from the mining industry from mining the coal, ore and minerals which belong to the Queensland people, not to a federal political party. The only jobs Rudd's mining super tax will create will be jobs in Canberra not Queensland. In Queensland we have lost jobs and will lose more jobs if Mr Rudd continues with his rot.

It is time that he and his deputy, Julia Gillard, concentrated on fixing the record numbers of illegal immigrants arriving in Western Australia, the massive roting and rip-offs in the school building system and

the lives lost in Garrett's roofing insulation crisis. Just in passing, in relation to Julia Gillard, whom many are saying could be the next Prime Minister, I have to share the comments of former Labor member of federal parliament Brian Courtise who says that the federal Labor Party would be better off recruiting and putting its faith in the current New South Wales Labor Premier as their future leader because comparing Kristina—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ryan): Order! Member for Burnett, I direct your attention to the purposes of the bills before the House and I ask you to come back to those bills.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Just in finishing, comparing Kristina Keneally to Julia Gillard—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I am sorry, member for Burnett, not just finishing. I direct your attention to the purpose of the bill and ask you to come back to the bill.

Mr MESSENGER: I return to the bill and simply mention in passing that comparing Kristina Keneally to Julia Gillard is like comparing Grace Kelly to Phyllis Diller.

Before I criticise the Premier for allowing her Treasurer to spend more than we have earned, I would like to sincerely compliment her on her recent decision to stand up to an overseas mining company, Chinalco. It wanted to simply dig out the ore and put it on a ship and transport it to China for processing. If Chinalco or any other overseas mining company is allowed to carry out business like that, then we will become no more than a shovel-to-ship mining operation and we will miss out on the Queensland jobs, prosperity and advances in technology which will come if we fail to ensure that high-level processing of ore is carried out in Queensland.

In recent political decision making surrounding this budget there is much that is bad and needs to be commented on. We are still spending more money than we have earned. We have spent \$42.4 billion while only receiving \$40.7 billion, leaving an operating debt of \$1.7 billion. It fundamentally means that this government cannot find savings of \$1.7 billion out of a total budget of \$42.4 billion in order to balance the books.

That is a real worry and could be addressed by convening a deficit and debt crisis conference now comprising all political parties, economic and management experts, a few seniors in my electorate from the Carlyle retirement village and the parents and friends from the Isis kindergarten. They understand budgets implicitly. They could be commissioned with the task of finding \$1.7 billion in savings.

I am happy to start the ball rolling with three initiatives for saving \$238 million. No. 1: once again I ask this government to stop the \$30 million of state funding directed to a soon to be privatised desalination plant at Agnes Water which the community no longer needs or wants. No. 2: reliable sources close to the government estimate that we could save \$8 million per year simply by scrapping registration sticker labels altogether. Let us scrap them. No. 3: the Premier's husband is employed in a useless, superfluous department of climate change sustainability costing \$200 million. It does nothing. It has not and never will stop the climate from changing. Let us get rid of it.

Ordinarily this \$1.7 billion operating deficit would not be a problem but we have record current and forecasted debt from \$51 billion to \$81 billion. That is \$14 million a day in interest payments on loans from a majority of overseas interests. We have lost our AAA credit rating meaning money costs us an extra \$200 million dollars in interest payments alone. That \$200 million could have been spent benefiting the people of Queensland. Indeed, benefiting the people of Burnett who all rely on, for example, the public health service at the Bundaberg Base Hospital.

In last year's budget the government promised to spend \$2 million on the Bundaberg Hospital mental health unit. It has disappeared. I query that disappearance. Last year this government said that it would spend \$26.5 million on the Bundaberg Base Hospital. The budget figures show that it spent \$13.381 million. It underspent by \$13.119 million on the promised budget of last year. It will spend another \$16 million—\$11.69 million this year and \$5.1 million ongoing. I am very appreciative of that.

To cope with the existing population we need a hospital with at least 300 public beds. All the experts say so. Toni Hoffman, nurse whistleblower, says that we need that. We cannot forget that the Burnett-Bundaberg region has one of the highest growth rates in the state. I look forward to the day when we receive a new hospital capable of coping with the existing population as well as the growth rate. We deserve it because it was the sacrifice and suffering of Burnett-Bundaberg families which saw a doubling of the state's health budget. This year, as we have heard from many members opposite, it has reached almost \$10 billion. That came about because of the focus that was placed on the health system by the crisis which, unfortunately, befelled the people of Burnett and Bundaberg five years ago.

Earlier this week I asked the Minister for Health about leave entitlements for Toni Hoffman, the very courageous nurse whistleblower. The minister promised to act on this injustice. As of this morning, he still has not followed through on his promise. He still has not even had the decency to contact Nurse Hoffman—no excuse for treating an Australian of the Year award winner in an appalling way. All Ms Hoffman wants is a decent break and to have some time to sleep and recover from five years of

continual stress. She should not have had to use her recreation leave to prepare and give evidence to two royal commissions and a criminal trial.

Government members interjected.

Mr MESSENGER: It is disgusting, arrogant behaviour on behalf of this government, and those members opposite murmuring their snide interjections should hang their heads in shame.

The township of 1770 has received out of this budget \$560,000 to complete the Joseph Banks Conservation Park redevelopment, and it is much needed. In terms of the Agnes Water Fire Station, last year this government promised to spend \$500,000. It spent \$300,000—underspent by \$200,000—and this year it promises to spend \$938,000 with no ongoing funding. We are very appreciative of the capital works money spent on the Agnes Water Fire Station. The Isis District State High School library renewal gets \$560,000 of very welcome new money.

With regard to main roads throughout the Wide Bay-Burnett, there are not too many individual items listed and I am very frustrated by the various columns in the budget papers. However, I can comment that last year's budget was \$579.524 million and this year's budget is \$740.81 million. That is an increase of \$161.294 million, or 28 per cent, in the overall budget for statistical division 15, and I am very appreciative of that as well. There is almost \$1 billion worth of roadworks state-wide not itemised under various projects that I have identified, and I will be fighting very hard for upgrades to Elliott Heads Road and Moore Park and Gooburrum local roads as well.

Rail and rail safety is a very important part of this budget. I have had a conversation with a person who, on 15 November 2004, was one of the first people—within minutes—to attend the tilt train crash site at Rosedale. I table a transcript of that conversation and also a letter that I have sent to the CMC.

Tabled paper: Extract of a transcript of interview, dated 30 April 2010, by Mr Rob Messenger MP, member for Burnett [2430].

Tabled paper: Copy of a letter to the Hon. Martin Moynihan AO QC, Chairperson, Crime and Misconduct Commission from Mr Rob Messenger MP, member for Burnett, regarding the tilt train derailment accident that occurred on 16 November 2004 [2431].

This person is an ex-nurse—a valued community member who received high praise for the role that she played in rescuing the survivors of this disaster. In her past she was a theatre nurse and one of the original health professionals who started the New South Wales Health Commission. This person has made serious allegations which she has given me permission this afternoon to refer to the CMC and share with the people of Queensland. She also has phoned me and says that she can provide copies of police statements that she and her husband supplied to the police. This person alleges that there were three people in the cabin of the tilt train when it crashed and that this third unknown person—not one of the official drivers—was at the controls of the tilt train when it crashed. In my letter to the CMC I write—

As you will see from the enclosed transcript of the conversation I had with—

this lady—

she suspects that the third person who was present in the engine cabin of the train was hierarchy of Queensland Rail. The witness states 'There was a third person standing over them, a tall man, dark trousers, could have been navy, could have been black, white shirt, he introduced me to the drivers by name and he gave me the impression that he was a person of authority.'

The witness went on to claim that in the approximate six hours that she worked to assist the passengers she never saw that man again. He apparently disappeared. The former nurse provided—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ryan): Order! Member for Burnett, for the third time I direct your attention to the purpose of the bill and ask you to come back to the bill.

Mr MESSENGER: Thank you. I come back to the Appropriation Bill. Of course, in this bill rail is very important and rail safety is very important. In closing that particular section, I would simply mention that this accident is shrouded in mystery. The two drivers of the tilt train refuse to give police their versions of the story.

With regard to the Euleilah Bridge upgrade, Baffle Creek resident and community advocate Dale Hicks has asked that I draw the attention of the House to the fact that Baffle Creek desperately needs a new bridge to replace the Euleilah Bridge. Mrs Hicks wants this place to know that one lady went over the bridge yesterday and ended up in the water. They are sick of the one-lane bridge, which is obviously a huge safety hazard and obviously floods quite regularly when it rains. I am pleased to inform the House that the lady who drove off the bridge is safe.

There is an overseas company called Holcim, based in Switzerland, which is proposing to dig a great big hole in the ground—a quarry—near two rapidly growing coastal communities, Coral Cove and Elliott Heads, and a marine park. The residents do not want it there for a number of very good reasons—health, road safety, social and environmental reasons. It does not have to be there. Holcim has another six sites within 100 kilometres of Bundaberg that it could choose from, but by proceeding with a development proposal with the Bundaberg Regional Council, which is a major customer of the company—I consider that

a very significant conflict of interest—it appears that Holcim is keeping with its appalling environmental track record and inability to properly listen to community feedback.

This Holcim quarry development has already devalued the property investments of hundreds of my constituents and must be stopped. It is behaving like environmental delinquents and vandals by still proceeding with this proposal, and the community of the Coral Coast will fight this silly development proposal tooth and nail. The Coral Coast community has provided me with an overview of Holcim's environmental track record, and both I and the Coral Coast community are appalled and do not want these people as neighbours. I simply note in tabling these documents that in 2010 Holcim was fined \$280,000 in Western Australia for blasting into a heritage zone containing Indigenous rock art up to 10,000 years old; in 2008 Colombia fined Holcim \$424,000 for fixing prices in 2005; and in 2006 it was fined in India for failing to comply with takeover regulations during the acquisition of associated cement companies. The EPA also classes Holcim as a high-priority violator after the Ada, Oklahoma cement plant was fined \$321,000 in 2005 for violating its pollution limits more than 1,000 times in a single year. And the sorry list goes on.

Tabled paper: Bundle of documents relating to Holcim [\[2432\]](#).

Many things concern my constituents, and the development that is proposed for the Burnett for sandmining at Gooburrum by Bundaberg Sugar, another overseas company not acting in the community and the national interest, is not welcomed by my community. When the federal government approved the sale of Bundaberg Sugar to an overseas company, I doubt that the sale would have been deemed in the national interest if it had known that Bundaberg Sugar was going to be turned into 'Bundaberg Sand'. The proposed sandmine before the Bundaberg Regional Council is too close to residential areas and has caused property values and people's investments to devalue. It threatens public health, safety and the environment. On behalf of my constituents, I call on all governments—local and state—to oppose this proposal.

There is no money in this year's budget for the Agnes Water high school. However, I thank the minister for organising the meeting with the director-general, Julie Grantham, for the Agnes Water delegation and me. Because of the great advocacy from Ali Black and her committee, it turned around from being 'if there was going to be a high school' to, I believe, 'when and how big', and I look forward to that money next year. I have been given assurances that there is money in this budget for a private consultant to start the community consultation process. That process will deliver a win-win-win regarding secondary education for the Rosedale, Miriam Vale and Agnes Water communities. Even though Labor and Liberal federal candidates are trying to deny it, this project could determine who is elected in the federal seat of Flynn. Federal co-funding will ensure that this project is an absolute certainty, fast-tracked and bigger and better. Whichever candidate promises federal co-funding for a high school at Agnes will have the affection and the votes of the Discovery Coast.

Bargara residents and self-funded retirees Jim and Trish Filmer were disappointed to discover that there is not much in this budget for seniors. Mr Filmer stated that there is nothing there for pensioners except the silly increase in the rebate. Mr Filmer was referring to the increase in the electricity rebate from \$190 to \$216. He worked it out to be about 6.6c a day. In a 90-day cycle of powers bills, he said that that was an extra \$5 or \$15 per year. The most important thing Mr and Mrs Filmer would like to highlight is the desperate need for nursing home beds in Bargara. Currently there are no beds in Bargara. They have been personally fighting to see nursing home beds in Bargara for a number of years, to no avail. They said that they will not give up their fight for these beds and I am here to say that I will support them thoroughly.

Currently, the Bargara Police Station is operating only part-time. After-hours calls go through to the Bundaberg Police Station, therefore taking valuable police resources away from Bundaberg to attend to Bargara. The Bargara Police Station must be upgraded to a 24-hour police station to take pressure off the Bundaberg Police Station crew and to give added protection to the whole of the Burnett coast. The Moore Park community has consistently called for a police beat at Moore Park to provide better response times. They would still like to see this outcome become a reality.

It has been identified that Bundaberg needs a family orientated recreational facility in the area. A water park with an educational focus to promote and celebrate our unique coastal area, our reef and our turtles is a great idea not only to cater for the local community but also for tourists. I would like to see proper compensation for the victims of Queensland Health's mistakes. I look forward to a day when Independent members of this place will play a vital role in the reform of the budget and better budgets in the future.

(Time expired)