



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

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

Mr KNUTH (Dalrymple—LNP) (6.23 pm): This is another bankcard budget. That is how every Queenslanders would describe the 2010-11 state budget. This is the fourth year in a row that the funding for Queensland will be paid for by credit, with a surging \$84 billion deficit by 2014 which equates to \$18,772 for every man, woman and child. We have also lost our AAA credit rating.

It all started with Wayne Goss. He campaigned against the Wolffdene Dam, which was going to provide a million megalitres of water for the south-east corner. Goss campaigned against this, and so did Peter Beattie and so did Kevin Rudd. When Goss was in power, he developed the no new dams policy, and then when Beattie came to power he continued the no new dams policy. Then what happened? South-East Queensland ran out of water. So to save his own political hide, Peter Beattie flew over the Traveston Crossing and said, 'I will build my dam there because I want to provide water to the residents of the south-east corner.' This resulted in a \$600 million deficit and a water grid which has not produced a drop of water.

Now the government is selling off our profitable assets. We will see the sale of the coal component of Queensland Rail, which produces \$1 billion in gross revenue to Queenslanders, while Citytrain, a passenger service, runs at a loss of a billion dollars. Once the coal component of Queensland Rail is sold, who is going to pay for the billion dollar loss in the Citytrain passenger service? The answer is the taxpayers of Queensland.

It is a shame because Labor Party members have turned their backs on their fundamental principles and what they stand for. They are selling off Queensland Rail, the Port of Brisbane Corporation, Abbot Point and Forestry Plantations Queensland. It is disappointing that the government is now spending \$56 million on the acquisition of more national parks. The government is selling off Forestry Plantations Queensland and purchasing more national parks that have become a breeding ground for feral animals and noxious weeds, but the government does not have the money to manage the ones it has right now. The government is converting the state forests into national parks, which gives it the authority to kick the horse riders and motorcycle riders out of national parks. Where will the horse riders go if they are kicked out of the state forests? Are they going to ride on the streets? What a great idea! What a great innovation!

I note the budget has \$25 million for dental clinic teaching facilities at the James Cook University campuses in Townsville and Cairns. Dentists need to be a priority for rural Queensland. Many people are forced to travel a 500 or 600-kilometre round trip just to get a tooth fixed. I understand that after years without a full-time public dentist a locum dentist is currently available under contract at the Charters Towers Hospital and is providing public patient dental care. That dentist will be there until September but will then be gone. However, there is still no permanent dentist. Patients are burdened because they have to travel to Townsville to receive dental care. However, the 1300 number that Townsville residents use to arrange dental appointments is not accessible to out-of-town patients. The two phones listed in the Telstra phone book are a 1300 number and also 47899900 and they are not for appointments. The out-of-town patients are at their wit's end, wondering how to successfully arrange a dental appointment at the Townsville clinic.

One of my constituents reported embarking on a three-hour round trip to Townsville to be able to access the 1300 number so she could secure a dental appointment. Other constituents have reported that they have tried phoning the 'not appointments' number in an attempt to get through to someone who can direct their call to the right area, but they have had great difficulty getting through on this fixed phone. The result is costly, long distance charges for extended waiting periods on the phone. Dental patients who use the public system are often pensioners or on a low income, so this is very disturbing. I am asking the minister to investigate extending the use of the 1300 number to include rural areas for patients who must travel to Townsville for dental services and who need to arrange for a dental appointment.

There was no extra funding provided for roads in my electorate, even though the Tablelands produces up to a billion dollars a year in gross revenue. Last year I tabled a petition with 1,129 signatures from residents of Ravenshoe who called on the minister to direct funds to upgrade a stretch of the Kennedy Highway from the East Evelyn Road to the intersection of the Kennedy Highway and Tumoulin Road. Permits have been issued to some transport companies for B-doubles to transport goods around the township of Ravenshoe. However, this decision has ignored the most practical and safest route, which is the section the residents are asking to be upgraded and delegated as a B-double route.

The result has been increased traffic through the centre of the town. Not only is this unsafe for residents but also makes it difficult for transporters to satisfy fatigue management requirements. The result is an increased cost for farmers. It is also proving damaging to the existing road network in and around the town. Fruit and vegetables from the area are transported to the southern markets, including Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. By upgrading this intersection and the adjacent road section, the road will be safe for all users and it will provide a suitable permanent B-double route away from the centre of town, which is safer for all residents and satisfactory for farmers and truck drivers.

Another disappointment in the budget was that there was no extra funding for the Herberton to Irvinebank road. I have personally travelled over this road and have experienced its shocking state. The fact that the sealing of this route was not prioritised years ago is astonishing. Shocking accidents and dreadful injuries have occurred along the road, including the rollover of a minibus. Road users risk life and limb every time they use the road and they also risk inevitable shocking damage to their vehicles. The local bus driver who transports schoolchildren has broken down five times and the children are forced to wait in stinking hot conditions. Both Herberton and Irvinebank are towns of immense historical importance. Consequently, they are attractive to domestic and overseas tourists and historians alike. We should hang our heads in shame at the condition of the Herberton to Irvinebank road. It is a deathtrap and the government must stop pussyfooting around and seal the road once and for all.

I would also like to mention the Millaa Millaa Malanda Road, which is a deathtrap. There have been a lot of accidents and quite a number of deaths over the years. It is also a B-double route. It has a lot of weaving bends, corners and curves. I believe this needs to be prioritised as well.

Sitting suspended from 6.30 pm to 7.30 pm.

Mr KNUTH: I wish to add to what I was saying in relation to the roads in the Tablelands, and I had mentioned quite a few of those. It is very important to mention that in the Tablelands there have been a number of deaths involving public bike riders. The member for Cook has also brought this to the attention of the parliament. While we want to encourage people to indulge in physical activity by riding to work, on the Tablelands there are only very limited bicycle lanes and signage is also a problem. This is something that we will be tabling in the parliament. I bring that to the minister's attention, to make him aware that we need more funding and support to provide more bicycle lanes and signage.

This budget does not really give me anything to boast about in relation to extra funding for the seat of Dalrymple, even though the electorate produced about \$6 billion in gross revenue. However, it is very important to note that there is no rail freight service between Townsville and Mount Isa, so all transportation is now by road and not by rail. That has created quite a lot of congestion on the roads, with an increase in the number of B-doubles and quadruples using the roads. Therefore, it is very important that we have more passing lanes between Townsville and Mount Isa. I have brought this up in parliament before and I have brought it to the minister's attention. There is only one passing lane between Townsville and Charters Towers, whereas there are eight passing lanes between Townsville and Burdekin. An increase in the number of passing lanes would be much appreciated by all in the area, because the roads are becoming very dangerous. There are no areas to pass and there are a lot of B-doubles on the roads. As I said, we do not have a rail freight service as it was closed down. We do not have a Q-Link service, because that has been closed down. Everything is transported by road. Therefore, just to sweeten us after closing down all the Q-Link depots, the least they can do is give us some passing lanes between Townsville and Mount Isa.

I was disappointed that there was no increase in the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. As members would be aware, with the removal or downsizing of local hospitals there is very limited access to specialist treatment. Patients in rural and regional Queensland have to travel further and further. They have to go through so much red tape to try to access the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme, but the return they get is a pittance. The subsidy is only 15c a kilometre for petrol and \$30 a night for a motel room. If someone is travelling 300 or 400 kilometres and has to stay in a motel, 15c a kilometre and \$30 a night is not much. In

the run-up to the last election the opposition was quite clear that we would increase the subsidy to 30c a kilometre for petrol and \$90 a night for motel accommodation.

Mr Reeves: Is that your policy now?

Mr KNUTH: We had already committed to it. It would be encouraging to see the government commit to it as well.

One thing that was welcomed was the extra funding for research into a vaccination for the Hendra virus. That is very welcome because it is a very serious issue. Flying foxes carry a lethal virus that is passed through horses to humans. It is not a nice thing to see people dying as a result of contracting this serious virus. That is welcome funding. However, it is very important that we look at the cause of the virus. We must look at where it is coming from, which is the flying foxes. We really cannot afford to have flying foxes living amongst people. They carry a lethal virus, they are vermin, they are a pest, they screech, they carry ticks and they excrete over people's homes, their children and the schools. I believe this is a great step forward, but the first thing we must do is look at the cause of the virus.

Because flying foxes carry a lethal virus that can kill people, we cannot afford to have them roosting and living amongst people. It does not matter how many people are sympathetic to the flying fox cause; the fact is that they carry a lethal virus that can kill people. When flying foxes flap in and roost amongst people, we must have strategies in place to ensure that the flying foxes are immediately removed. I very much appreciate the fact that more money will go into researching a vaccination for the Hendra virus. At the same time, common sense tells us that if we have something living amongst us that has the potential to kill people—and flying foxes have that potential—it has to be removed immediately. We must work together to find and implement strategies to have the flying foxes removed from residential areas at all costs.