




Speech by

Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

Hansard Thursday, 16 June 2011

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL;
COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER LEVY REPEAL AND REVENUE
AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (8.28 pm): I, too, rise to contribute to the cognate debate on the appropriation and revenue amendment bills. Firstly, I commend the shadow Treasurer for his excellent contribution to this debate this morning. The shadow Treasurer eruditely highlighted the deficits in the Treasurer's performance, and that of the government more generally, in handing down this year's budget. I will touch on some of those deficits.

Firstly, as a state our finances were in trouble long before the global financial crisis and the natural disasters. We were on track for \$65 billion in debt before the GFC and it was heading in the direction of \$85 billion in debt before the asset sales. Funnily enough, after selling \$17 billion in assets for the sole purpose of paying down debt, we are still heading for \$85 billion in debt. That is not a GFC and it is not natural disasters. That is plain and simple ALP economic mismanagement, straight from the ALP textbook. What frustrates me most is that the interest payments on that debt will equal \$595,000 each and every hour, or \$100 million a week. What we could do with \$100 million in Glass House! However, I will touch on that later.

The truth is that the Treasurer failed to deliver real, long-term cost-of-living savings for Queenslanders. The shadow Treasurer, on the other hand, has outlined how a can-do LNP government would tackle the biggest issues facing Queensland households such as their rego bills, water bills, electricity bills and sneaky Labor taxes. Yes, the LNP supports the removal of the repugnant ambulance tax, saving \$113 per year on Queenslanders' power bills—it always has—but we will also freeze vehicle registration on the family car, saving another \$15 to \$20 per year.

Our four-point water plan, which I reiterated in the debate last night, will cut around \$80 from the annual water bill in South-East Queensland. As announced by the shadow Treasurer this morning, a can-do LNP government will also freeze the standard domestic tariff, tariff 11, providing savings of \$120 per year. The LNP also opposes the 125 per cent increase in transfer duty on family homes. When in government it will reintroduce the principal place of residence concession for transfer duty, saving a typical family who moves house once every seven years \$2,315 a year.

Those are real savings. Those are real policies. As the shadow Treasurer has already challenged, we call on the government to steal these policies for the sake of all Queenslanders. It should steal them in the same way it has stolen our policies on addressing crime on the Gold Coast, like it has stolen our policy on GPS tagging of sex offenders, like it has stolen our policy on abolishing the ambulance tax and like it tried to copy—but failed dismally—our water policy. Those opposite harp on the LNP being bereft of policy ideas. No-one is listening anymore because everyone knows that it is a mistruth. The fact is that it is the ALP that is bereft of policy ideas and that it only wants us to put out more so it can steal them. So it can go ahead—steal away—and truly help Queenslanders address their cost-of-living issues.

I now turn to the environment portfolio. I note that the minister put out a rather shrill media statement. Before she throws stones, perhaps she should look at how her own government considered the environment when it came to this budget. For starters, the big environmental announcement, the \$60 million extension of the ClimateSmart Home Service, was not even promoted as an environmental initiative; it was portrayed as a cost-of-living program. Let us look at the Treasurer's words. I quote from the media statement of Saturday, 11 June. It stated—

Queenslanders will receive even more money-saving devices to help knock-down their household bills, under a new and improved ClimateSmart Home Service announced by Treasurer Andrew Fraser ...

He went on to say—

As at 1 June 2011 more than 277,000 Queenslanders have had the money-saving ClimateSmart technology installed ...

The LNP certainly commends the intent of this initiative, but clearly the Treasurer is following the lead of the LNP and is focusing on cost-of-living pressures first.

In terms of some of the capital funding allocations for the environment, the LNP has identified some alarming trends. Consistent with Labor's mismanagement and neglect of national parks, a number of projects need to be singled out. There is the Bunya Mountains National Park. It was meant to be completed in 2008-09. There was nothing in that budget outyear forecast but, in fact, last year there was a \$70,000 underspend. Where did that come from? Delay and mismanagement!

Then there is the Cardwell QPWS base, another project that was meant to be completed in 2008-09. Again, there was nothing in the 2008-09 outyear forecast, and back then it was worth \$620,000. It has gone missing for three years but now it is back, bigger and better than ever. In fact, it is much bigger, at \$1.025 million. We have to ask the minister why, and where was it in the 2010-11 budget papers?

Equally alarming and very consistent with the LNP's concern that the current government has a 'lock it up and throw away the key' mentality when it comes to national park management is the \$150,000 underspend on boundary fence work for the past year. The QPWS was slated to spend \$172,000 on boundary fencing this past financial year; it spent \$22,000. No wonder the LNP and I as the shadow minister are fielding calls from concerned landholders who neighbour national parks.

Continuing the trend of mismanagement and underspends, the Lytton Quarantine Station came in at \$200,000, or 57 per cent, under anticipated expenditure for this financial year. The line item of 'QPWS building and accommodation upgrades—various' was \$100,000, or 50 per cent, under budget. Was this mismanagement? Was this poor planning? Was this redirecting money from these vital capital works programs to prop up mismanagement in other arms of the government, perhaps the Health payroll debacle? Similarly, and perhaps most disconcertingly, there is a \$2.7 million underspend within rainforest and green land acquisitions. Is this not a failure to secure land of the highest conservation value?

The LNP has long been calling for additional investment in ranger positions, so we are pleased to see the allocation of \$10.5 million over four years to employ an additional 50 QPWS staff. I will be watching with interest to see how these positions are allocated and where they pop up. I will be interested to see if this allows the government to catch up on its appalling record of producing management plans for its protected estates.

I will also be watching with interest the development of the Biodiversity Strategy for Queensland. Feedback that I have received to date from stakeholders suggests that this is not a true aspirational strategy but, rather, a hotchpotch of existing initiatives and programs, pulled together and re-released with a new glossy cover. If that is the case, I am concerned about whether the \$3.9 million made available over the next four years will really achieve the stated goals of reversing the decline in biodiversity and increasing the resilience of species, ecosystems and ecological processes. I am a big fan of corridor protection, as I have stated on numerous occasions, but it needs to be done in the right corridors based on scientific rigour, solid planning and consistent with an ambitious strategy. The government's history to date on each of these elements is pretty disappointing. It is a lot of money to waste and I hope the government has got it right this time.

I turn to the electorate of Glass House. In short, I am disgusted not because, yet again, the Bligh Labor government has neglected the good constituents of Glass House and treated them with disdain but because it takes us for fools. It is one thing to be treated with contempt and to be ignored; it is insulting to be treated as idiots. Does the government really think we would not see through its deception, through its spin? That deception is best displayed in the regional budget statement for the Sunshine Coast. The three 'marquee' items listed for the electorate of Glass House are not new announcements; they are rehashed, recycled, respun announcements, some from as long ago as 2008-09. There is \$196,000 to replace two bridges at Kondalilla Falls National Park. That is funny; last year it was \$75,000 for the same bridges. There is \$6 million to complete the \$11.1 million project to replace Hammond Bridge at Six Mile Creek,

Elimbah—another old announcement rebadged. Ask any local from Elimbah and they will tell you how astonished they are at the slow progress on this bridge replacement project. Now we know why. It is so that this tired, old Labor government has something to announce in this year's budget.

Then there is the amount of \$500,000 to 'start' the \$5 million upgrade to a section of the Maleny-Kenilworth Road between Cambroon Creek and Booloumba Creek Road at Cambroon. Firstly, this is not funding to start the project. The Treasurer obviously did not talk to his Minister for Main Roads because even the most cursory glance at the recently tabled Queensland Transport Roads Implementation Program would reveal that this is not the case. To date, \$2 million has already been spent on this project. Add the \$500,000 for the coming year and that actually leaves \$2.5 million still to be spent. Some 'start'! The project is actually very well advanced. I would be happy to show the Treasurer the temporary barriers that have been alongside the road for the past two years and the mountain of earth that has been shifted. I do not expect the Treasurer to walk the road each year as I do, but I do expect him to do his homework, consult with his colleagues in cabinet and present the truth, not spin. No-one who uses the Maleny-Kenilworth Road will be hoodwinked by this glossed-up announcement. They will be grateful when the project finally recommences, but they will not be duped.

If we delve deeper we can find a couple of wins for the people of Glass House. Students at two Maleny schools will be safer because the Sunshine Coast Regional Council has extracted contributions from the Treasurer in the form of the TIDS program. So students travelling to Ananda Marga River School will be grateful to know that the state government is plugging in \$108,000 and the regional council \$107,000 to widen Bridge Creek Road. All I can say is thank you to local Councillor Jenny McKay for listening to her constituents, prioritising this project and forcing the government to come to the party.

Similarly, Councillor McKay has been instrumental in ensuring that the Maleny State School will receive improved passenger set-down facilities through a \$60,000 joint state and local contribution. I think it is fair to say that both Councillor McKay and I see this as a temporary solution. It does not resolve the ongoing safety and traffic issues on Bunya Street outside the school. A true, long-term solution involves the development of the Maleny precinct, the relocation of the Maleny swimming pool and the relocation of bus and vehicle set-down and pick-up facilities away from the main road altogether. I will be working with her and with the Minister for Main Roads and the Minister for Education to make this happen in the short term.

But perhaps the most significant achievement for the electorate of Glass House is not actually even in the budget papers. It is actually in the Queensland Transport and Roads Investment Program—and that is a time frame and budget allocation for the upgrading of Steve Irwin Way between Bowen Road and Amy Drive at Glass House Mountains. Importantly, this includes the dangerous intersection of Steve Irwin Way with Reed Street. Again, I have been lobbying in conjunction with outgoing local Councillor Anna Grosskreutz to get this on the program, and it is great to see it there. The project will kick off some time in the 2013-14 to 2014-15 time frame with an injection of \$4.8 million, with an additional \$19.4 million to follow. This will be a great relief to the residents of the township of Glass House Mountains. It does create problems, sure—problems such as the relocation of the much loved Glass House Mountains RSL club, but everyone knows that this is desperately needed, so they will be reassured to know that it is going to happen.

In the time remaining I would like to touch on what is not in the budget—projects that are priorities for Glass House, projects that I will continue to pursue. The most glaring omission in both the budget papers and QTRIP is any commitment to the north coast rail corridor duplication. Commuters on the coast know all too well that funding for the project was pulled three months after I won the seat of Glass House off Labor. They also know that the government has gone to great lengths to ignore them in the time since. Not only has there been no further commitments to reinstate the project; the government, the minister, refused to meet coast commuters regarding the recent timetable changes, and the government continues to treat them with contempt with respect to periodical ticketing. Fortunately, commuters know that I will not rest until we get action on the corridor, on the timetable and on the fares.

I will use other opportunities to detail my concerns regarding north coast rail, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank a few people: firstly, the shadow minister for transport for his willingness to catch the train from the coast, meet with commuters and represent their concerns; to Rail Back on Track for their ongoing advocacy; but most importantly to those commuters who have worked with me to pester the government on these matters—none more so than Jeff Addison. I can only say that I am disappointed that Jeff was unsuccessful in his bid to be the Sunshine Coast representative on the Public Transport Advisory Group. But I know this: the Sunshine Coast representative, Natasha Hart of Nambour Safe, will have no better ally than Jeff.

Another disappointing omission is the D'Aguilar Highway. Put simply, the deaths continue but the safety upgrades go missing. I am most disappointed that the black spot funding submission made last year by the state government has disappeared into a federal government black hole. All attempts to date to gain

an update on the submission have been ignored. I do acknowledge that in discussions with the Minister for Main Roads just yesterday he has undertaken to source this update. But an update is one thing; we need action. We need investment in improving the safety on this dangerous highway. Locals have had enough. They have approached me to sponsor a petition, led by principal petitioner Beverley Wilson, to reduce the speed limit on the highway between Rangeview Estate at Wamuran and the township of D'Aguilar to 80 kilometres an hour. This is not an ideal solution. It is not a long-term solution. But, as a short-term remedy to the ongoing deaths occurring on this highway, it is perhaps our only remaining course of action in the absence of funding for upgrades. I look forward to the minister's update and ultimately his response to this petition.

There is still no word on the Caboolture Health Hub either. How long will it be before this fast-growing population has a purpose-built health centre of their own? How many more services, like the Children's Therapy Service, are going to be lost to Caboolture because they have no facilities? It is just not good enough. Is it going to take a hardworking LNP member for Pumicestone in Lisa France to actually deliver this for the families of Caboolture and surrounds?

The Minister for Transport has made much of the government's investment in cycleways. Well, the top priority for the electorate of Glass House is still absent. The kids at Beerwah High who live at the Glass House Mountains need a safe way to commute to school. It will not take much but we continue to go without.

In concluding I want to touch on a concern that impacts on Queensland as a whole, not just Glass House. It also impacts on the portfolio of environment.

Government members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms van Litsenburg): Order! There is too much noise in the House.

Opposition members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Those on my left.

Mr POWELL:—and that is the Bligh Labor government's record, action and investment in biosecurity. I am concerned most about myrtle rust, which has already found its way into nurseries in my electorate, and the Asian honey bee. I know that even as recently as this morning the Minister for Agriculture has pledged Queensland's support to biosecurity through \$3.5 million generally and \$800,000 specifically for myrtle rust. I have to be honest and say that that is not enough—the horse has already bolted. The fact that the Asian honey bee is not receiving any contribution from the Queensland government is concerning. I shared this with a leading scientist in the field of bees from my electorate, Max Whitten, and I just wanted to share some of his responses. He states—

Thanks for this, Andrew. I have rung the Minister's media people to find out why Fire Ant and Myrtle Rust have sums allocated to their eradication/control but nothing for Asian Bee. A—

member of the minister's office—

is following up for me.

I'm not impressed if QLD is reneging on funds to crank up the eradication program for AB. Yesterday and today there is a Meeting of States and Commonwealth etc in BNE to talk about the proposed revived eradication program—which was supposed to start at the beginning of May. And we are still talking! The AHBIC rep at the BNE meeting, Trevor Weatherhead (who is also President of the QLD Beekeepers Association) said little of value happened at yesterday's meeting. Let's hope more happens today.

If QLD does not lead the way on taking AB seriously, the whole exercise will collapse. In my view, AB is a more serious threat than fire ant; and hundreds of millions have been spent (or mis-spent) by QLD on this serious pest.

Overall, this budget has been very disappointing for Queenslanders, for the environment and for Glass House. It is yet another tribute to the debt, mismanagement and waste of this tired Bligh Labor government. This state needs new passion, new plans and a reinvigorated energy. A can-do LNP government will deliver that for Queensland.