




Speech by
Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Friday, 17 June 2011

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

 **Ms GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (8.53 pm): I rise to support the 2011 state budget which I believe features strong funding for community support, education and transport for Brisbane Central. More importantly, this budget creates and maintains a jobs focus, even though we have had a summer of disasters and the required \$6.8 billion repair bill. This 'steady as she goes budget' will strengthen the state's structural budgetary position. Those are not my words but those of Standard & Poor's credit analyst. The best policy position that this government can deliver to Queenslanders is the maintenance of a strong focus on jobs, both in maintaining jobs and job creation, together with a well-funded and well-delivered training program. These two crucial issues for working families are exactly what this budget will deliver.

This budget will deliver a \$15 billion Capital Works Program during 2011-12, supporting 93,000 jobs and building the infrastructure of the future. This follows the previous financial year's spend of a record \$17 billion, which has delivered jobs and more jobs for tradies, electricians, engineers and construction workers as well as investing in our state's future. No-one in this House can honestly stand up and complain about the amount of capital and infrastructure investment that this government has delivered during our term. The numbers speak for themselves and the projects—either delivered or being delivered—are too numerous to mention. They include such things as Airport Link, new hospitals, new schools, new roads, new bridges, drought proofing South-East Queensland and the best education reforms that this state has ever seen—to mention but a few. In fact, I strongly believe that the introduction of the prep year and the announced building works to move year 7 into secondary school in 2015 are some of the best education reforms that I will see in my lifetime. They are great policies delivered by a Labor government.

This government's 2006 'learning or earning' reforms have achieved a most successful outcome, with the proportion of young people with a year 12 or vocational education qualification increasing to 88 per cent. We are also rolling out 240 kindergartens across Queensland. All of this has been delivered in spite of the global financial crisis and the enormous rebuilding expenditure of \$6.8 billion that this state faces following our natural disasters. But make no mistake: this budget is focused on the task ahead, grabbing the opportunity at hand for the betterment and prosperity of all Queenslanders.

I have listened to most speeches from those opposite bemoaning the state debt. I can honestly say that I have never met a successful businessperson, homeowner or entrepreneur who has not incurred debt at some time. In the past, governments at both a state and a federal level have all incurred debt to deliver much needed infrastructure—for example, the Story Bridge, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Opera House and the list can go on. My point is that in times of economic downturn and, indeed, strong growth periods, as Queensland has experienced, it is incumbent upon governments to step up and deliver the projects of the future and the much needed jobs for working families. That is what this Labor government has delivered not only during times of hardship, such as this state's worst drought in modern history, which is

conveniently forgotten by those opposite, but also during periods of strong growth—something I might add that was never addressed by the federal Howard government during its time in office.

The Howard government did very little in the area of additional funds for Queensland's roads, hospitals, public housing, education and training. It abolished the training levy and now we have a skills shortage. It did not increase funding for university places and kept the number of doctors in training at the same level for over a decade and now we have a doctor shortage. It did not invest in housing and now we have an affordable housing shortage and a problem. It did not invest in roads and now we have a roads problem.

The truth of the matter is that it is easy to save money when you do not spend any or invest in our future. But beware because what you do not spend today as a nation on the essentials will undoubtedly catch up with you. This state government was left to pick up the expenses when it came to delivering for the people of Queensland. Ironically, in times of boom, the Howard government did attack workers and their families through Work Choices with the most aggressive stripping back of workers' rights and entitlements that this country has ever seen.

The Howard government could not help itself and it paid the political price. However, I never heard those opposite complain or lobby the then Howard government for its failures to invest adequately in this great state and in its workforce. But ironically, member after member on the opposite side has risen in this House to demand more money for their areas and at the same time complain about the state debt—money needed to invest in our future and fill the large funding gap left by the Howard government. Only now are we receiving vital additional federal funds from the Gillard Labor government.

But, in spite of this obvious neglect, what do we find in Queensland? Business investment grew by an estimated 13 per cent this financial year, exceeding the national result of 4.5 per cent and the forecast of 9.5 per cent. Business, unlike those opposite, is not talking down this state. It is sending a loud message that Queensland is the state to be, that this is where it is happening. With this growth, the GFC and natural disasters and associated infrastructure expenditure come pressures on cost of living, an outcome that this government is well aware of. That is why we have the most comprehensive rebates and assistance packages for those who need a hand with the cost of living. Our pensioners deserve our support and I welcome this budget's increases in subsidies for local government rates, electricity bills and the SEQ water charges for the elderly in our community.

In addition, I welcome the abolition of the ambulance levy on electricity bills, delivering a saving of \$113 to around 1.4 million electricity account holders, whereby now the ambulance will still arrive but the bill will not. The government will continue to provide free ambulance cover for all Queenslanders by meeting the full costs of the Ambulance Service.

The great Australian dream is still buying and owning your own home, and I welcome the massive \$140 million Queensland Building Boost program to assist young people into the housing market. This program will assist first home buyers and Queenslanders buying a newly constructed home or signing a contract to build a new home with a \$10,000 grant from the state, and it will keep construction workers in jobs. First home owners can now receive up to \$17,000—real assistance to get a roof of their own over their head. This program will stimulate activity, promote supply and support jobs in the housing industry, which is currently undergoing a slow period, as I understand to be the case in my very own electorate. This program is targeted and time limited but offers great advantages and grants to those who take up this opportunity to make their dream of homeownership a reality.

I also warmly welcome a commitment in this state budget to continue the successful drink-safe precincts trial for another 12 months, with an allocation of \$4.27 million. This means greater police numbers, better transport options, special safe zones and community support. This funding now fully pays for the two-year trial put in place by this Labor government, ensuring safer venues where young people can enjoy Brisbane's world-class night life. This is great news for the licensees and patrons of Fortitude Valley in my electorate and demonstrates this government's commitment to young people and the Valley precinct.

This contrasts—and how!—with the recent BCC budget that stripped funds from the community supported Chaplain Watch, removed the position of place manager, Fortitude Valley—just when things were finally getting cleaned up in the Valley—and removed dedicated officers to the Valley area working with the community. The BCC has turned its back on the Valley and inner city, ignoring the filth for years—which, ironically, was finally being cleaned up—and allowing deteriorating buildings posing a safety hazard to patrons to rot by totally disregarding its local responsibilities.

In fact, I am sick and tired of the BCC, which under the previous Lord Mayor started destroying Brisbane's inner city. The inner-city suburbs have been destroyed with untold advertising pollution from the failed CityCycle scheme, parking meters everywhere, overdevelopment, extraordinary rate hikes for unit owners—some in the vicinity of 300 per cent and 400 per cent—and failed refurbishments like King

George Square. In contrast, this state budget helps Queenslanders into homes and jobs, provides cost-of-living relief and delivers on education and training. I seek leave to have the remainder of my speech incorporated in *Hansard*. I have received the Speaker's approval and I have emailed a copy to Hansard.

Leave granted.

In fact, I welcome the record spend on Health and Education, which since being the member for Brisbane Central I have seen the schools in my electorate being transformed. The extra maintenance funding for Kelvin Grove and Brisbane Central State Schools is most welcome and I commend the budget on the allocation of more than \$328m for building works and new classrooms as well as further allocations for new teachers and teacher training.

Community infrastructure is vitally important in my electorate as many people in need often frequent the inner city. Therefore, funds allocated for community support for people with a disability or mental illness are most welcome, as is funding for affordable housing going to BHC to construct and complete over 160 units in the inner city.

Protecting the environment is most important for many residents of Brisbane Central and I believe the budget allocation of \$60m extension to the ClimateSmart Home Service to help Queenslanders reduce their energy consumption, electricity bill and carbon footprint is money well spent. I know this service has helped me to save energy and I urge all residents to avail themselves of this service.

I also welcome the continuing investment in helping troubled youth through our youth justice initiative and expanding help for domestic violence sufferers, especially in indigenous communities. I believe that no-one should live in fear, regardless of their family or skin colour.

Make no mistake, this budget is about jobs, easing the pressures on cost of living for pensioners and those most in need and delivers on the community needs of the future. In spite of tough times from mother nature and the global economic conditions, this state budget promotes real opportunity for business and ordinary Queenslanders, delivers record funds for health and education and training, provides for the workforce of tomorrow and provides for the inner city and regions alike.

I commend the Treasurer and his staff on tackling these difficult times front on and finding the balance in this budget where standing still is never an option.

I commend the budget for 2011-12 to the house.