




Speech by

Peter Wellington

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

Hansard Friday, 14 September 2012

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; FISCAL REPAIR AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WELLINGTON** (Nicklin—Ind) (7.39 pm): I rise to participate in the debate on the appropriation and related bills and in doing so respond to the Treasurer's budget. I note that the government's explanation for postponing the bringing down of the budget from June to September was so that the new government had proper time to prepare its budget and understand the possible ramifications of the budget decisions on our community. I acknowledge the difficult challenges the Treasurer has had to grapple with in balancing expectations after such a landslide win at the recent election against pre-election commitments and the level of the state debt left by the previous government.

I note the different opinions that have been aired during this debate about whether the new government took over a state debt of \$65 billion or \$62 billion, or however many billion dollars it was. To me there is no doubt that the Newman government took over a state debt of over \$60 billion. But I do not agree with the government's claim that, if it did not make the drastic cuts to existing services in Queensland and reduce the Queensland Public Service numbers significantly, Queensland was headed for a state debt of \$100 billion by 2018-19. To me that claim in Peter Costello's report, which has been the foundation on which this budget has been based, has been discredited. I realise other members may disagree, but this is my view.

The other claim the Premier has made is that, unless his government made the tough decisions contained in this budget, Queensland was headed to become like Spain in Europe. Quite frankly, this claim has been rebuffed by all reputable political commentators. I do not know what planet the Premier was on when he made this ridiculous statement. It certainly does not send a clear message of a statesman-like Premier, leading from the top and knowing where he is going.

I note that a number of members have spoken about the merits of the government's new mining tax, claiming that the government is going to make sure that the mining companies that operate in Queensland pay more royalties to assist in reducing Queensland's debt. The Deputy Premier has stated that the new royalties schedule will apply and be locked in for the next 10 years. To me this claim by the Newman government that they are increasing Queensland's revenue by establishing a new mining royalty schedule is another stunt. I understand that the existing federal-state agreement sets out that, if a state government increases a state mining tax above a predetermined level, that amount of increased tax will be deducted by the federal government from the GST the state will receive from the Commonwealth. I refer members to the Mineral Resource Rent Tax Heads of Agreement, the Australian government Commonwealth Grants Commission *Report on GST revenue sharing relativities: 2012 update*, the Parliament of Australia Senate select committee report, the Commonwealth Grants Commission GST distribution model and also the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations.

In other words, the new mining tax the Premier has created is, in my view, revenue neutral to Queensland finances. I see it as simply another politically opportunistic trick by the Premier to come up with a distraction from what is really happening in Queensland and to pick a fight with the federal government—more spin and no substance. Who wants to be a hero and go off to the High Court and fight

another battle? We have heard from the Attorney-General. He is heading off to the High Court to fight a battle. To go to the High Court costs significant dollars, and I believe it is a cost that this state should not have to bear.

I also believe that the Premier's continual referral to Peter Costello's claim about Queensland's level of debt and the need for significant Public Service sackings and defunding of many community services has been instrumental in destroying confidence in Queensland. This government can certainly blame the previous government for many things, but I believe our Premier must take full responsibility for destroying confidence in Queensland. Without confidence in our community, people will not spend, people will not invest, the flow of money in our state slows down and everyone is affected one way or another.

Many members have commented on how this budget has delivered on the government's pre-election commitments. Yes, we certainly have seen the Treasurer honouring many of the government's pre-election commitments, which I will touch on later. But one of the most important commitments that the Treasurer has not been able to honour—and that is because it has been outside of his control—is a commitment from our Premier when he himself said he would lead with dignity and humility. This pledge costs nothing but is important in building confidence and trust between our government and everyone throughout Queensland.

In the lead-up to the last election and before the election was held, Mr Newman, the then Liberal National Party leader, stated very clearly that under his leadership there would be no forced redundancies in the Public Service. This was a core election commitment. It was a deliberate, considered statement made to influence voters' intentions in the lead-up to the election. The Premier knows exactly what he said. He is not a fool. Recently I saw on YouTube the following clip—and I ask members to listen and I ask: who said this? It goes like this—

This election is about a clear choice: Labor's 20-year broken record or the LNP with the strong and united team to get Queensland back on track.

All hardworking public servants in Queensland should look forward to a bright and rewarding future with the LNP, because the LNP has made clear commitments to work with Queensland's hardworking and dedicated public servants. Particularly we promise no forced redundancies and we will not continue Labor's unfair and arbitrary 2.5 per cent wages cap.

Our state needs change ... To get Queensland back on track we will work closely with Together Union members and all public servants. We know that working very closely with a highly skilled and highly motivated Public Service is the key to making things happen.

We're totally committed to ensuring you have the support needed to get your job done. We're also committed to working constructively with the Together Union, and I am committed to enterprise bargaining in good faith.

Experience as the Lord Mayor of Brisbane taught me the importance of working closely with public servants and their unions, and my record with the lowest levels of industrial disputation in many decades speak for themselves.

I've seen firsthand what can be achieved when the knowledge, skills and expertise of staff are valued and rewarded. That's why I'm committed to ensuring Queensland's public servants are well paid and confident about job security.

And it goes on. I wonder who made those statements?

This budget shows which election commitments the Premier and his leadership team wanted to keep and which ones they wanted to break. We also see how the Premier and his leadership team commenced a strategy to justify why the core election commitments involving the Queensland Public Service were broken while others were honoured. Now we have the absurd claim by the Premier that 'it is simply not true that his government has sacked 14,000 public servants', with the Premier claiming the Queensland government workers who were affected were not sacked but chose to take voluntary redundancy packages. Quite frankly, I think the Premier is learning some of the worst tricks from our former Premier.

Rob from Wynnum wants me to respond to the Premier's claim. He says—

For God's sake Campbell, could you please stop—

I will not use the word he used—

I was involved in deciding who stayed and who left and I can tell you that many of those who were tapped on the shoulder broke down and cried when told the news. This is hardly the response of someone who wanted to go. The fiscal situation is not flash—we all acknowledge that and a seasoned leader would be able to sell the message without needing to lie (eg, we'll end up like Spain, the debt is \$100 Billion and no-one has been sacked) ...

And it ends—

Have the courage to tell the truth.

Mr NICHOLLS: I rise to a point of order. I believe there was an unparliamentary word there.

Mr WELLINGTON: I withdraw. I believe this budget clearly reflects on the credibility of our Premier and I have no doubt that members will continue to put their own interpretations on the budget according to their respective positions, just as I am tonight.

Before preparing my response to this budget I reflected on previous speeches I have made in this parliament. The record shows that I have both congratulated ministers and criticised ministers when I have

considered it appropriate, and on this occasion I will not be intimidated by any Liberal National Party stooge to not say what I feel needs to be said.

Health has always been an issue that is dear to my heart. I note that in the budget the Treasurer and the government has committed significant dollars to start the Sunshine Coast University Hospital. That is appreciated and we all look forward to the day that that hospital will open to serve not just Sunshine Coast residents but people from afar who will travel to receive attention at the hospital.

I also note that recently previous governments have spent significant dollars on upgrading the Nambour Hospital. Recently \$11.6 million was spent on new cardiac and vascular surgical procedure suites, dedicated endoscopy units and new outpatient neurology services. What I am trying to say is that there have been real dollars spent in the past by previous governments on upgrading the Nambour Hospital but, unless you have appropriate car parking, people cannot get to the jolly hospital, visitors cannot visit the patients in the hospital and staff have real challenges in trying to work at the hospital.

The government says that it has no money, but can I say to the government that there are a lot of resources in this state that it has access to and that it can sell tomorrow. One issue I have raised in the past is land which is owned by the state government in Nambour and in our towns throughout this state that could be sold tomorrow for residential development or commercial development.

In relation to my claim for building a high-rise car park at Nambour, I again put this on the record to the Treasurer: sell the land in Glenbrook Drive, Nambour, where the government was going to build the park-and-ride service and put that money towards building a high-rise car park at the hospital. The government says it has no money, but here I am giving the government real suggestions on how it can generate income. It can sell some land that is surplus to its needs, put the money into the Treasury coffers and use it to build infrastructure.

I recently reflected on a report that was tabled earlier this year by the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee. There were 38 recommendations contained in that report and, when I was reading through the budget papers, I was curious to see whether the Attorney-General had responded to any of those recommendations in the report. I note the Attorney-General has responded to his pet project, the boot camp for juvenile people.

I want to take members to some of the recommendations which I think are significant and worthy of consideration. Recommendation 5 of the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee states—

The Committee recommends that the government consider the allocation of additional resources to the CMC's forensic computing unit in order to better support investigations of paedophilia and child exploitation material.

Recommendation 7 states—

The Committee recommends that as a priority the Government allocate greater resources to the Crime and Misconduct Commission's proceeds of crime function in order to assist the CMC in retaining existing staff and attracting new staff while also meeting the demand for new civil confiscation actions.

The Crime and Misconduct Commission brings significant dollars into the state government revenue through the confiscation of proceeds of crime. We need to make sure that the Crime and Misconduct Commission is properly resourced, so I ask the Treasurer again to please respond to these important recommendations. There is no sense, in my mind, spending all of our resources on a boot camp for young people if we do not make sure proper funding is allocated to our peak crime fighting unit, the Crime and Misconduct Commission, which is tasked with responding to the big end of town criminals. Recommendation 22 states—

The Committee recommends the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice as responsible minister ensures the CMC has adequate resources to operate effectively under the new Police Complaints, Discipline and Misconduct System, as envisaged by the Independent Panel's report.

I may be wrong, but I have seen nothing tabled in this parliament by the Attorney-General either in his response to this budget or in ministerial statements responding to any of these significant recommendations made by this parliamentary committee. We have seen rallies of public servants outside our parliament where there were thousands of people. I sincerely hope we do not see a reduction in staff at our Crime and Misconduct Commission. Our Crime and Misconduct Commission officers are specialist officers. We cannot simply advertise and say that 10 will apply and we will fill a vacancy tomorrow. These are specialist officers who have specialist duties. I put on the record my support of that unit. I urge the government to make sure we never see the day where staff of our Crime and Misconduct Commission are retrenched because of some Treasury decision that there is not enough money available.

I also put on the record my support for the government's proposal to cut red tape. I have spoken about this many times in this chamber and it is good to see that at long last our government is starting to move on cutting red tape. I see that the Deputy Premier is here. On this issue, can I say that we have a contentious issue on the Sunshine Coast—the Caloundra South development—where the previous government approved it and took it out of council's hands. The current government and the Deputy Premier are familiar with this case. It has been finetuned and certified and now it is all systems go. But we have to make sure that the current residents of the Sunshine Coast are not left with meeting the cost of the

infrastructure funding of this new city. This new city was going to cater for up to 50,000 people. We have a rush to cut red tape and streamline development, but we have to make sure that, when the government makes it easier for the development, the developers pay their fair contribution. A concern I have and that many on the Sunshine Coast have is that, in the rush to approve this Stockland development for Caloundra South, we have been left with a requirement for the residents of the Sunshine Coast to pick up the tab and meet an infrastructure cost of up to \$500 million. If that is the case, that is a disgrace.

Other members have spoken about the great decision the Treasurer has made to make specific money available to our state public schools to assist in the maintenance of the buildings. Treasurer, I thank you and I support you 120 per cent on that. For years, I have been trying to get former education ministers to fund this instead of having the P&Cs go out there and do the fundraising. There is no doubt that every school in Queensland—and I know every state school in my electorate—will be overjoyed when they apply to access some of these funds.

On the issue of roads, yes, there is funding allocated for the Maleny-Kenilworth Road, the Palmwoods-Montville Road and the Nambour Connection Road. The Minister for Transport has recognised that there will be a fixed speed camera at the intersection with Blackall Street at Woombye.

On the issue of the Palmwoods-Montville Road, can I just say that the whole reason the government has had to spend over \$11.9 million is that it was affected in the recent disaster when half of Queensland was affected. I suppose that is why I think the Peter Costello report is discredited—there was no real recognition of the significant things that happened in Queensland during the last government and prior to that. We had the global financial crisis and we had massive flooding and destruction throughout the length and breadth of our state. This road in my patch—the Palmwoods-Montville Road—was significantly damaged and this government has had to commit over \$11.9 million to start to repair it, and it has been out of action for years.

I also congratulate the minister and the government on their initiative to try to put a spark into the building industry with the first home owner construction grant. That certainly is good news. I expect governments in the future will continue down this road to try to provide incentives to first home buyers—whether it is a \$15,000 grant or whatever it might be. This is a good news story.

Time is running out. Recently, I had the opportunity of having a university student work in my office as an intern, Michelle Withers. She came just after the Premier and Treasurer started to announce their budget intentions and she asked, 'What can I do?' I said, 'Michelle, can you speak with some of these community groups and put together a quick report on the impacts of the budget on these community groups?' I was originally going to table this report but there are people's names mentioned so I will not do that. It is a 20-page document and I propose to briefly refer to it and I will forward it to the Treasurer. If anyone else is interested, they are welcome to get a copy.

Michelle Withers quickly put together this impact analysis of the budget on a number of organisations. Those organisations were: EPIC, which is Get Set for Work programs and Skilling Queenslanders for Work; the Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service; the Woombye Gardens Caravan Park; the Coast2Bay service; Solutions4Learning; Getting Work Ready programs; the community literacy program; EMERGE, which runs out of the Maroochy Neighbourhood Centre; and some others.

This report shows how the government's decisions to cut funding from these important services are affecting the most vulnerable in our community. I realise that dollars are tight and they have to be spread around. This report that Michelle has prepared shows me that there was no real analysis or cost benefit analysis done on the effects of cutting the funding to these programs. This is a report prepared by a university student in a couple of weeks and it is very informative reading. It talks about the effects of pulling the funding from these important programs—not just the effects on the people who are immediately affected but the effects on their families and our communities. We have heard so much talk about the Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service being a waste of time, but I just cannot condone those comments when I read these reports and listen to people. I know how effective it has been. It provides such an important service in our community. I will forward this document to the minister. I urge members and the minister to read some of these reports. I realise the budget is going to go through and it will all be ratified shortly, but where is the next stage? The next stage is that we have a midterm budget review.