




Speech by

Sean Choat

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH WEST

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

 **Mr CHOAT** (Ipswich West—LNP) (11.07 pm): I rise to speak to the 2012 state budget. There is little doubt that this is perhaps the most anticipated budget of all time in Queensland, as it is no doubt the most important in a generation and one that will chart the future for Queensland's economic recovery. It is interesting that the opposition has such difficulty acknowledging that Queensland is indeed in a serious situation with regard to its finances. If one listens to the opposition, the Bligh-Fraser-Beattie years have left us in a sound financial position. In a way it reminds me of the story of the emperor's new clothes. The fairytale came to an end for the Bligh government for so many reasons but none more so than its dreadful financial management and its destruction and sell-off of Queensland's assets like QR. It would be wrong to say that this budget has not hurt anybody. Unfortunately it has and that concerns me, just as I know it does every government member. I have been through a redundancy myself as a result of the previous government's decision to sell off the railways, so I know about the uncertainty and the concern firsthand. But you get through it and it can provide some very great opportunities.

Mr Shuttleworth: Did they let you know that was coming?

Mr CHOAT: They certainly did not. There were 9,000 people who were shifted from QR Ltd into QR National and thrown to the wolves. I have also been on temporary contracts with the government in the past and on those occasions I always knew that at the outset there were no guarantees about longevity.

Over the years while working in the Queensland government I saw many people employed on temporary contracts and those contracts were extended year after year. They were never at ease and always dreaded the approach of the end of the term of their contract. Temporary contracts and casual employment are part of life for many Queenslanders. The vast majority of those people are at ease with that situation and work hard to demonstrate their value to employers and many enjoy the flexibility that temporary contracts and casual employment provides. I know many small businesses that sadly have had to let staff go as a result of tough economic circumstances. I know it pains those business operators to have to make those decisions. In those circumstances there is little choice, as to not act may see employers lose their entire workforce. I have listened to businesspeople who are heartbroken at having to let workers go. Similarly, Queensland is in a tough financial situation and our Public Service workforce has to be cut now to avoid compounding problems down the track. This is no different from what has happened and continues to occur in the private sector. Not even the government can be immune to having to rationalise its workforce. As I mentioned earlier, I am always concerned to hear about anybody in the public or private sector losing their jobs. It is debt and overspending that is the villain in this story, aided and abetted by the Bligh Labor government.

In life and in business, the basic rule of finance is not to live beyond your means. Put simply, you cannot spend more than you earn. For years the Queensland Labor government ignored this basic principle and used borrowings to spend well above its means. Debt is not always a bad thing. We all use it to buy things such as cars and the family home or to fund renovations. Indeed, most people have personal and car loans as well as mortgages that give us the things that we need to improve our lives. However, the

most important thing is that we plan for paying back the debt and reducing the interest we pay on it. The previous government lost our AAA credit rating as a result of poor financial management, meaning that Queensland has paid a 1.6 per cent higher rate of interest than have other states. That is enough to send a shudder through the spines of most mortgage holders. Just imagine what a 1.6 per cent hike in interest on a mortgage would do to a family budget. The major focus of this once-in-a-generation budget is to reduce debt, restore the AAA credit rating and redirect savings into efficient front-line services. This was clear to Queenslanders prior to the election and it has always been expected that tough decisions would be needed to fix Labor's mess. I am pleased that, despite the difficult circumstances, there is much consideration in this budget for improving the lives of the people in my electorate.

One of the major projects funded in the budget is the infamous Blacksoil interchange. I certainly was pleased to hear the transport minister mention it tonight in his speech. Over the years this project has been talked about and promised by successive governments and I am pleased to be part of the government that turns it into reality. We will see over \$55 million spent by June 2013, getting the majority of work completed with the project set to be delivered in full by early 2014, in total costing nearly \$94 million.

Another win for the residents of the Ipswich West electorate is the approval of the new Fire and Rescue Service station at Brassall, which was also mentioned by the minister tonight. This project represents a \$3.9 million investment in the safety and wellbeing of the people in my electorate as well as the protection of their property. Schools in my area will benefit greatly, including the Fernvale State School, through over \$1.3 million invested in improving the school's administration centre. In addition, I am thrilled about the injection of \$200 million across Queensland to address the shameful backlog in school maintenance, with all of the state schools in my local area eligible for grants of up to \$160,000 for works to improve and repair school facilities. The best part about this initiative is that the money will be managed locally by our great P&C committees with their school principals. They will be able to choose how the money is spent and will be free to select their own local contractors, meaning savings and support for local businesses. That will certainly achieve great improvements for our children. While I am talking about local businesses and contractors, they will all benefit from the increase in the first home owner grant from \$7,000 to \$15,000 for those building or buying a brand-new home. That will stimulate construction and get our tradies back to work and families into quality new homes. The stimulation across the small businesses in my electorate will be immense. The stamp duty concession on the purchase of the family home will be reinstated, providing savings of up to \$7,175. I know many real estate agents in my local area are thrilled about this, as it means strong and sustainable growth in business and jobs in the property sector.

The improvement in local roads will see the maintenance and upgrading of our state funded roads. I will continue to lobby on behalf of residents for critical projects such as the Pine and Delacy streets intersection at North Ipswich to be funded in the future. I am pleased to see that this government is investing \$20 million in promoting tourism in Queensland. I will be looking for my cut of those dollars to promote Ipswich and the beautiful Somerset region as great places to visit and stay.

Health services in my region will receive a much needed boost, with \$60 million for the expansion of Ipswich Hospital, \$170,000 for the helipad for emergency transfers and \$9.5 million spent across the region for upgrading equipment and other works to improve patient care and wellbeing. Very important to my electorate is the \$4.5 million to be spent on flood remediation and hydrology works to provide security and peace of mind to residents who know firsthand the devastation of floods.

Water rebates, the reduction in public transport fares, the freezing of electricity tariffs and private car registrations will put money back in people's pockets. I look forward to increased law and order on our streets, with great new resources for our police, including more officers and facilities such as the Riverlink police beat. As the people of my electorate well know, I will be looking for even more police and facilities to protect people and their property. Queensland, and indeed the electorate of Ipswich West, is open for business. I look forward to seeing the benefits from this budget continue. I congratulate the Treasurer and the Premier and the cabinet for their hard work in bringing down this budget. I know some of the decisions were not easy, but I am confident that the vast majority of Queensland will benefit from and appreciate the difference the budget will make. I commend the bills to the House.