



Speech by

Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Friday, 14 September 2012

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

Mr BENNETT (Burnett—LNP) (3.22 pm): This is my first budget, I am happy that it is a strong budget and I am proud to add to the budget debate. Over the past 15 years, as a concerned Queensland I have sat through many budget days delivered by the previous ALP governments. I kept saying to myself, 'If the ALP government had plenty of time to address all of the challenges facing the state and had set us up for the future as we were being told, and if the Labor government had its priorities right over a such a long period, why do we still have a health crisis? Why do we have a lack of affordable water security in our great state? Why do we still have traffic problems on my electorate's roads?' These were the questions we were asking when we witnessed the amounts of money being spent and wasted by the now failed ALP government. The question uppermost in the minds of the people of my electorate is: where did all the money go? Queensland's financial situation has been a disaster since 2007-08. Labor went on a spending spree, rather than showing any discipline. In early 2000, Queensland's borrowings were low. Since then, borrowings tripled from \$18 million in 2005-06 to \$53 billion in 2010-11. It is no wonder that the ratings agencies became concerned and the interest rates on Queenslanders' taxes increased.

Our first step was to get public expenditure under control. Since 2000, Public Service employee expenses have grown by an average of 8.7 per cent per year. The effect was a massive expansion in the size of the Queensland public sector from fewer than 150,000 employees to more than 200,000 and an unsustainable increased wages bill. We all know that, in terms of revenue and expenditure, this is a strong budget and once again ours is going to be a financially strong state. Generation after generation has seen conservative governments having to solve the financial disasters left by Labor governments, both federally and at a state level. That is something that the more mature members of my community have seen many times. Each time, there is a little more frustration felt at the wasteful and reckless spending entrenched in the Labor Party.

Following the great trend of conservative party Treasurers, this Treasurer has struck a good balance between the desperate economic needs of the state and the people and the social needs of all Queenslanders. That is the difference between the LNP and the Labor Party. Not only will the LNP balance the books but it will also promote economic growth. The LNP is in touch with the community, we know what people experience day in, day out and we have delivered. I welcome the comment this week from ACOSS President Karyn Walsh, who stated—

There are some positives from the budget in social housing and easing of cost of living pressures.

It is encouraging to read the positive response from the Local Government Association, stating that the budget confirms allocations of \$495 million over four years for the Royalties for the Regions program, which will help councils in the north of my electorate that are eligible for the funding to invest in improvements to roads and community infrastructure. Again I mention to the House the desperate need to flood-proof the roads in my electorate, especially the Fingerboard Road and the Essenden Bridge.

Certainly I have some great news to promote in my electorate. One of the initiatives that I am very pleased with is the grant of \$15,000 for first home buyers to buy a newly built home or off the plan. That

initiative will boost construction in my electorate. The Advancing Our Schools Maintenance Fund will allow state school P&Cs to apply for up to \$160,000 to fix existing priority maintenance issues at schools. It will be great for education outcomes by providing appropriate learning environments for our students. I remind the House that the government service delivery can be conducted by QBuild, especially when there is a need to manage risk. I welcome the contestability improvements with the Department of Public Works for this organisation.

This budget will address one major issue for patients in my electorate having to travel to access medical services, with a doubling of the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme. My community safety will be better served with a priority \$1 million allocated to revitalise Neighbourhood Watch and Crime Stoppers and additional police officers. I welcome the announcement of the \$3.5 billion investment in capital infrastructure so energy and water can continue to be provided in a safe and reliable way. Affordable power and water is vital to the sustainability of my electorate. Many families will be delighted with the release of the Elderly Parent Carer Innovation Trial, Parent Connect and additional respite for young people with a disability aged 16 to 25. Those are really exciting and welcome innovations.

This budget delivers for the future in three very significant ways. The first is the sound investment in Queensland through a focus on productivity, particularly through the generators of investment and employment, that is, business. The budget does this by ensuring that our businesses are motivated to invest in our state through actions such as tax cuts, which are outlined in the budget. In fact, I am pleased that many Queensland businesses will no longer pay payroll tax. For an electorate such as Burnett, where there are over 3,000 small businesses—the powerhouses of employment in this state—this means financial and red tape relief, but most of all it means jobs, although not at the expense of workers' wages. The budget provides real opportunities for employers to grow their businesses through tax relief and provide employment through that growth.

Secondly, the budget delivers through building front-line services in critical areas, for example, a record \$11.862 billion for health initiatives, more staff on weekends, reduced waiting lists by partnering with private providers, targeting funding to get my constituents off Labor's waiting list for the waiting lists, emergency repairs to rural and remote hospitals, and enhanced maternal and child health services to provide additional access to home visits and community clinics in the first year following the birth of a child. There are strong investments in the Education budget and record spending in Transport and Main Roads, Police, Emergency Services, Communities and Disability Services, just to name a few. There is extra funding to support victims of crime organisations, which will provide much needed recovery and support. I am supportive of the investment in the agricultural sector, especially the funding for sugarcane industry research, development and extension. Peak horticultural organisation, Growcom, has said that the state budget has included a number of positives for agriculture reflecting the LNP's pre-election commitment to the industry as one of the four pillars of our economy. Queensland is the powerhouse of this nation and it is responsible to ensure that we protect our assets by ensuring we are providing for our increasing population during the continued time of growth.

Thirdly, two aspects of the budget that give me the greatest sense of pride in our government are the record investment in Health and our schools. The record Health budget delivers for the people of Burnett. This is an excellent budget for Queensland and also the Treasurer's first budget. I congratulate him, his ministerial staff and his departmental staff on what has been a well-delivered and received budget. It gives me great pleasure to commend the bills to the House.