




Speech By  
**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE**

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE  
AMENDMENT AND TRADE AND INVESTMENT QUEENSLAND BILL**

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (3.53 pm): In speaking to the Appropriation Bill I acknowledge the increase in funding to disability services. Since 2004 there has been an increase year in, year out to support disability services. I believe we are going forward in this important area, especially with the signing of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the continued funding. It is good that we can all work together to ensure the best outcomes for adults and children across Queensland with disabilities. I feel that this is a step in the right direction.

It is also good to see that there is an increase in funding for health. Hopefully that funding benefits the right people. There is around \$6 billion in growth revenue produced in the region around Moranbah, yet Moranbah does not have a maternity service. Last year in the budget \$9 million was announced to fix the roof of the Atherton Hospital. It was announced again this year. I applaud the minister for announcing it twice. Yesterday I questioned the minister about the Atherton Hospital. It is important to ensure that funds go to the right place. We do need the roof fixed. But if wardsmen hours are cut it means that the nursing staff have to pick up the patients. That puts pressure on the nursing staff.

The Atherton Hospital is a 56-bed operation. It has been twisted in such a way that there are now flexibeds. Now the hospital receives funding for 42 beds. When those extra beds are needed they bring in staff from outside. They think that those staff are waiting there to be called out. These experienced staff will move elsewhere. This is a problem that we see in places like the Atherton Hospital where funding has been reduced. Cutbacks have taken place. There is a dialysis machine at Atherton but there is not enough staff to operate it so patients have to travel to Cairns four days a week. Patients' families are coming into the hospital and having to assist in showering patients because there is an overload of work. When there are cutbacks in administration staff, nursing staff have to take phone calls. Sometimes staff have to deal with the patient's travel subsidy. There is a domino effect. It puts great stress on the hospital.

We secured funding for the roof, but we want to ensure that we provide the appropriate care to patients in those regions. We need to investigate this very strongly, very powerfully. Money is being allocated, but we want to ensure that it is going into the right area. It is important to fix the roof. We support that. But we want the nurses to be functioning at their full capacity. We do not want them to be stressed out and constantly recalled to duty. We do not want to see good nursing staff leave because they cannot cope. We want to see patients get dialysis at the local hospital rather than travel to Cairns four days a week. We want to see nurses with support from wardsmen who are able to pick up those patients.

This is about putting money where it is needed and focusing on where the money should go. We need to address this. We need maternity services in Moranbah. That region produces \$6 billion worth of gross revenue. There are mums, who are about to give birth to a child that will be so important in their life, staying in motels for three weeks in Mackay. This is the year 2013. We had

better services 30 years ago. We support the Queensland Plan and looking 30 years ahead at what we can achieve. If we look at what we were doing 30 years ago, rural and regional Queensland will prosper. We had the medical services, appropriate police services, railway stations and thriving communities. We had medical surgery performed in local hospitals in rural and regional Queensland. It is simple to speak about a 30-year plan; the government needs to look at what we did 30 years ago and invest money into it.

If money and services are removed from regional hospitals, people are driven away from the regional and rural areas and into the cities. Rural people who need medical assessments, surgeries and other requirements will have to travel to Cairns, Townsville, Mackay and Rockhampton, putting greater stress and pressure on those regional hospitals. You resolve that by investing in the regional hospitals to ensure that they can offer medical services and that they are staffed by quality nursing staff and wards people who are not stressed and overworked. You ensure that people can access the patient travel subsidy. We have to offer those services all day, rather than have people waiting for hours and hours. We need the money to put a focus on getting the priorities right.

The increase in the cost of electricity by 22 per cent is a big kick in the guts for pensioners, householders and small businesses.

**Mr Cox:** They get a discount, mate.

**Mr KNUTH:** That is lovely and I am sure that once we had a discount for everyone, but that has now gone. The problem is the flow-on effect: businesses, that are already suffering, will have to put up their prices and people, who are already suffering, will have to pay more for food and clothing. Pensioners will suffer more. Things started to fall down when the Liberal Party and the Labor Party both agreed to privatise the retail arm of our energy sector. The Liberals said passionately, 'We must back this by whatever means are necessary, because it is about privatisation, it is about supporting big companies and big business and it is about competition to get the best outcome.' However, that competition has resulted in massive increases in the price of electricity, I think by about 400 per cent over the past four or five years. I see people nodding their heads, but these are the facts. That is why it is important that we do not sell our energy assets.

The Treasurer said that the figures are down for property tax and other taxes, but there has also been a loss of revenue. He did not mention the loss of revenue from the privatisation of our assets. He did not mention it because we are not receiving income, as we did years ago, from the \$1.2 billion coal haulage industry. We are not receiving income from the Gateway Bridge, the forests and the ports that were sold. That income is no longer coming in. I can see that, but the Treasurer does not want to mention it because he wants to sell more. He is selling government buildings that could generate income for future budgets. He is selling the remaining share of Queensland Rail, which could generate money for Queenslanders that instead will end up going to—

**A government member:** Debt, Shane, debt.

**Mr KNUTH:** It goes to pay off debt, but once that is done the money is gone. The asset is no longer generating money for us to pay off debt. In the past, governments invested. They built power stations and dams. They put infrastructure in place. They did get into debt and it was bigger debt than we are in today. However, I am concerned that this government is all about trying to make the books look good for the next election. This process should take over five, six or 10 years, but somehow they are hell-bent on making things look good before the election. They say, 'We will put our hands on our hearts and show what a wonderful thing we have done. We have reduced the debt. We have sacked 14,000 workers'—

**Mr Johnson** interjected.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Miss Barton): Order! Member for Gregory, I am struggling to hear the member for Dalrymple.

**A government member:** So are we.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Members, the member for Dalrymple has the call.

**Mr KNUTH:** It is very important that this budget is not just about getting rid of debt, because then everyone will suffer so that the government looks good at the next election. This was very badly thought out, because 14,000 workers are no longer spending in motels and other local businesses. They are not supporting their communities because they do not have jobs. Small businesses are going broke and people are going broke. Then the government says, 'We are losing revenue! We don't have revenue!' We are still following that example; nothing has changed. The government is looking at the problem of debt, for which it keeps blaming one particular party. We should look at

addressing the debt over an eight-year period rather than trying to look good before the election. However, this government is determined to make the books look good before the next election.

I welcome the recurrent funding of \$150 million over five years for the Gregory Development Road. I thank the government for continuing that project and not taking funds from it. That is a great thing. It is important to have inland highways to relieve the traffic congestion on the coast. During Cyclone Yasi, the coast road was cut, on and off, for a two-week period and the inland highway was used. Both state and federal government money is going into that road, which is a good thing. However, we need to upgrade the crossings at creeks such as Snake Creek, Fletcher Creek, Basalt River, Clarke River and Hann Creek. If we focus on upgrading those bridges and crossings, the inland highway will be used by more trucks and vehicles. That will relieve pressure on the Bruce Highway and perhaps we will not need to spend so much money on it, although I think it is important that we do spend money on that highway. However, there would be less pressure on it. Therefore, while it is good that money is being spent on the regional highway, the bridges need to be upgraded to improve the inland highway and create an alternative transport route.

Each year the Tablelands produces \$500 million in gross revenue. In that area, the roads are improving. About five years ago you could say that they were probably the worst roads in Queensland, but they are slowly improving. The previous state government allocated money to upgrade the Kennedy Highway between Tolga and Mareeba and disaster relief funding has also been allocated to that road. However, the intersection of Grove Street and Tolga Road is near where all the mums pick up their children from the Atherton primary school. It is a very dangerous intersection. Cars have to travel uphill to meet a main highway. While money from disaster relief has been invested in that road—and I know that a criteria has to be met—I was disappointed that that intersection was not allocated funding for an upgrade. Previously I have brought up this matter. We need to upgrade that intersection, because this is about saving lives through whatever means are necessary.

We have not seen any investment in infrastructure to resolve the problems associated with power generation costs. That is a big kick in the guts to people. I am sad that people have to pay such a massive increase, which they do not need to be paying. In this parliament, we moved to introduce, slowly and gradually, a 10 per cent ethanol blend and allow for another avenue of cogeneration so that by investing in sugarcane, grain and power generation we can deliver clean energy and create jobs and wealth. Government should not say, 'We are going to cut.' We are going into a recession and what are they doing? They are cutting. This is a time when they need to invest, to put money back into the community. A Labor government cut funding before the Depression and then we were faced with the Depression. Now we are experiencing a downturn and what does the government do—cut, cut, cut and sack, sack, sack.

One service that is important to my electorate is the Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service. I know that the federal government has allocated \$2.5 million to help that service. It is a good service in my area. It provides jobs for local people. It provides a service to my community. The state government needs to work with the federal government on this because the service is beneficial to my area. It is beneficial to the people who rent and to the owners. They all work together.

**Mr Cox:** The tenants.

**Mr KNUTH:** That is right. Thank you, member for Thuringowa.

Another issue I wish to address is the emergency fire levy. I take my hat off to all of our firefighters who play a role in our communities. They raise funds for their brigades by selling raffle tickets. I purchase a few tickets myself. It is a kick in the guts for those people to be hit with a \$183 fire levy when they put the fires out themselves and raise funds themselves. They are out there selling raffle tickets. They are out there fighting fires. All of a sudden they will be belted with a fire levy.

Obviously the government feels that it is acceptable to cripple and kick in the guts all those rural residents who do a wonderful job fighting fires by hitting them with a 22 per cent increase in electricity prices. The LNP campaigned strongly at the last election that it would cut electricity prices. This is not a cut. I think inflation has been at around three per cent or four per cent, so this increase is five or six times the inflation rate. The government could cut it a little for one year. This increase is five times the rate of inflation. This is a big kick in the guts.

**Mrs Frecklington** interjected.

**Mr KNUTH:** It is up to you whether you want to support a 22 per cent increase. We were elected to parliament to take a stand and state that we do not want a 22 per cent increase in electricity prices. Our energy assets are making a return, but this is about them making more.

It was this government that supported and voted to back the Gillard government's proposal to pass the energy price increases due to the federal tax onto consumers. It was these government members who voted to back the Gillard government's passing of the carbon tax onto consumers.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr KNUTH:** You can look that up in *Hansard*. It is very simple. It was those opposite who voted in this House to back the Gillard government's proposal to pass on the energy costs to consumers. That might be part of the 22 per cent increase.

I notice that the Minister for Environment is in the chamber. We are looking for funding to get rid of the bats. No-one knows how to get rid of the bats. I know how to get rid of the bats. I know that the minister and Campbell Newman promised that the government will get rid of the bats by whatever means necessary. Everywhere we looked in Charters Towers we had LNP members saying, 'We will get rid of the bats.' But they are dodging, weaving and hiding to the point of being invisible. All we want is for someone to come and say, 'We will get rid of the bats by whatever means necessary.' What we need is funding to employ two parks and wildlife officers to spend their time chasing bats all day every day—smoking them out, spraying them with hoses. I want to work with the minister and the council to get rid of the bats.

*(Time expired)*