




Speech By
Ann Leahy

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Record of Proceedings, 17 July 2015

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (9.26 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the 2015 Appropriation Bill. This budget is one that should be viewed with great concern, and it is certainly viewed with concern by the constituents of the Warrego electorate. Agriculture, fisheries or forestry were not mentioned once in the budget speech; nor was there a mention of assisting agricultural profitability. It sounds a little bit like this government are not interested in the valuable agricultural industries.

I refer to the drought-affected areas that are doing it really tough at the moment in the Warrego electorate. In May the federal government announced a drought package to be delivered in cooperation with the state government. This is over and above the \$5 million worth of funds allocated in the state budget. There is a \$10 million package from the federal government to address issues with weeds and pests and with priority for fencing to control wild dogs and grazing pressure. Landholders in the local government areas of Balonne, Paroo, Bulloo and Murweh are to be the beneficiaries.

These federal funds are available now. The federal Minister for Agriculture, Barnaby Joyce, has his pen ready full of ink to write the cheques; however, the Queensland state government has not sent the agreement back to the federal government. The state government has had plenty of time to sign off on this package. It will help buy products locally and employ locals in areas which are doing it really tough. Given that this budget is supposed to be about jobs, one would think that the state government would be keen to have it signed off and delivered. Time is of the essence. The state government needs to stop the departmental procrastination and get the agreement back to Canberra as soon as possible so these communities can receive that assistance and also increase the number of jobs in their areas. The federal government has made Queensland a priority, and the state government is holding up that assistance during one of the worst droughts experienced in some areas of Queensland.

Just as this government is dragging its heels for drought-affected areas and jobs, this budget does little for profitability in Queensland. The thing that is going up, however, is the number of public servants. One billion dollars worth of taxpayers' money will go towards hiring another 3,000 public servants. I will make the prediction here tonight that we will not see too many of those public servants in the Warrego electorate. And, if we do, they will probably come in the form of the tree police.

I have a simple question to help explain this budget. Say that I have two credit cards and I transfer the debt on one credit card to another. Am I better off? According to the Labor government, yes, I am better off. On my assessment I still have the total amount of credit card debt that I started with. This government has also loaded up the balance sheets of government-owned corporations with debt—Ergon included—and then asked them to pay more in dividends. The reality is that total public sector borrowings—that is, the combined debt of the general government sector and the GOCs—will be higher in the future. It will not stimulate growth and jobs in the private sector or small business or in the drought-affected areas of my electorate.

There is a freeze on infrastructure, and infrastructure is critical in this large and decentralised state. I was at a TISB function in Roma where businesses were telling me they were off over the border to New South Wales to tender on Pacific Highway projects, because there was just nothing happening in Queensland and no plans on the horizon. They are chasing work interstate because there is nothing much happening for them in Queensland.

There is also the unprecedented raid on Queensland public servants' long service leave and superannuation entitlements. Some commentators have described this move as too cute by half. It is not uncommon for Labor governments in Queensland to do this sort of thing. The Goss Labor government raided the ambulance funds in my electorate. They raided the hospital board funds and any other hollow log they could find. The Beattie Labor government raided the GOCs—

Mr Rickuss: The motor traders.

Ms LEAHY: I take that interjection from the member for Lockyer. The Beattie government raided the GOCs and made them revalue their assets, borrow to the hilt and then send a cheque back to Treasury. Labor governments in Queensland follow a similar pattern. Now they are raiding public servants' superannuation and long service leave entitlements.

I am pleased to talk about the Warrego Highway upgrades between Toowoomba and Miles. This comprises 15 projects planned to be delivered by June 2019.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Grace): Order! There is too much audible conversation, members, if you could take those conversations outside. I am struggling to hear the member for Warrego.

Ms LEAHY: This program is funded by the Australian government and the Queensland government on an 80-20 funding arrangement. The Warrego Highway upgrades were developed and first announced last year by the former LNP government in partnership with the federal coalition government. I commend the hardworking federal member for Maranoa, the Hon. Bruce Scott, and also the state minister at the time, the member for Indooroopilly, for their work on developing the program in conjunction with the former member for Warrego and me. These projects were at risk of reallocation by the current Labor government, which had no plan and has a freeze on infrastructure. It is pressure from local community groups, like the Chinchilla chamber of commerce and industry, and me that has kept these projects on the balance sheet. I will continue to keep a watching brief on every one of those projects on the Warrego Highway.

The Queensland Health website, updated on 4 June 2014, states—

Master planning for the long-term future of the Roma and Charleville hospitals was completed in mid-2014 and a formal request submitted ... for the construction of new hospitals at each centre.

The site states that the request is to be 'considered as part of future government capital works programs'. The minister's press release this week states that the budget will provide funds for structural defects—those of us from Roma know that there are significant structural defects with this hospital—and a range of clinical functionality and backlog maintenance issues to be addressed at Roma Hospital. Planning has also commenced for the development of new infrastructure at Roma to best meet community needs. It would be helpful if the government would clarify if the planning it is intending in the budget is the same as that which has been referred to as completed in mid-2014, some 12 months ago. I urge the state government to move from the planning phase to the rebuilding and capital allocation for both Roma and Charleville hospitals.

I refer to the former LNP government's Great Teachers = Great Results program, which delivered significantly for the Warrego electorate. It is disappointing that there is no guarantee that the Great Results Guarantee will be funded beyond 2016. The LNP government in its last term invested nearly \$10 million in the schools of the Warrego electorate, and this only just cleared the maintenance backlog left by previous Labor governments. These schools are now hopeful that they will not have to again deal with money that they need for maintenance in their schools being held back.

I am a great supporter of the former LNP government's Royalties for the Regions program, which contained \$455 million over four years and made a huge difference to the roads, water supply and waste disposal in resource regions like the Surat Basin. The state government's Building our Regions program is only half the contribution of the LNP's Royalties for the Regions program.

I note that the government has provided some funding for projects in the Warrego electorate. However, there are many missed opportunities. There is much more work to be done across the south-west region. The budget does not outline any funding to rebuild Charleville Hospital, which is still located in a flood prone area. I also encourage the government to progress the proposal for type 2 road train access from Charleville to the Roma Saleyards. There are a couple of culverts to widen on the Warrego Highway and some corners to widen in Roma. David Scott, from the Livestock and Rural

Transporters Association of Queensland, and I have been actively pursuing these upgrades. There is only a small amount of expenditure needed to take a considerable number of trucks off the road and increase safety for young children at the Roma junior school.

Speaking of roads, on behalf of a constituent I raise the issue of the condition of the Bollon-St George road. Randall Newsham travels this road regularly. He tells me that it would have to be one of the roughest sections of road in the electorate. The other words he uses to describe it would have to be unparliamentary. I ask that the government seriously consider this section for further maintenance.

Talking of Bollon, I have been working closely with the Balonne Shire Council, which has been very active in constructing a levee bank around the town of Bollon. To complete these works there is a need for humps over the Balonne Highway—

Mr Rickuss: Is that the Bollon barrage, is it?

Ms LEAHY: No, it is not the Bollon barrage. They are humps along the Balonne Highway. That will completely flood-proof this community. I ask the government to give consideration to funding to assist that community and completely flood-proof it.

In relation to flood mitigation, I will be working with local governments in my electorate to investigate the best flood mitigation options for the following communities: Chinchilla, Meandarra, Jandowae, Warra, Mitchell and of course Roma stage 2. These communities will flood again. I can advise that the Building our Regions program is really going to get a work-out, because there is a lot more flood mitigation work to be done across south-west Queensland.

There are also missed opportunities in this budget in relation to moving freight onto rail and further developing freight centres like the Thallon uplands rail hub. I urge the state government to take the opportunity to commence a service to western communities on the Brisbane-Charleville railway line, which is not being utilised. It is sitting idle, wasting millions of taxpayers' dollars in maintenance. This project and the greater utilisation of this railway line will be a win-win for jobs, the taxpayer, the cattle industry and the entire south-west region.

I will hold this government to account and keep a watching brief to ensure every dollar allocated to my electorate is delivered to my electorate. I will also continue to fight, along with my local community groups, businesses and local governments, to improve infrastructure and services in the Warrego electorate at every opportunity.