




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR WARREGO

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; DUTIES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (12.40 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the appropriation bills. This is the opposition's opportunity to analyse how the state government have collected and expended Queensland taxpayers' money and if they have been responsible with the use of the taxpayers' money. In 2016 we have another Labor state government delivering a budget of increased taxes and raids on public servants' superannuation funds. Labor true to form have a strong track record of raiding funds. The words from the member for Southern Downs really do sum up this budget in about two lines—Labor have raided the bickie tin and now they are taking it down to the pawnbroker. It pretty well hits the nail on the head. Remember the Goss Labor government raiding the ambulance funds and the hospital board funds as well. I too remember the Beattie Labor government who raided the GOCs and made them revalue assets, borrow to the hilt and then send a cheque back to Treasury.

This is supposed to be an employment budget; however, it forecasts increased unemployment. This is supposed to be an infrastructure budget; however, it forecasts record low infrastructure spending. This is supposed to be a debt reduction budget; however, it has debt increasing. This budget sees Public Service expenses increasing six times the population rate—4,000 extra public servants last year and an estimated 5,000 extra this year. That is about 13 public servants being put on the government payroll every day, costing more than a million dollars a day every day. In my electorate, we are not getting our fair share of the teachers, the teacher aides, the front-line nurses and the health professionals, and how we would love to have some more permanent doctors. One only has to read the Health Service Delivery Statement to see the increases in expenditure due to higher payments for locum doctors. We would dearly like to have some more permanent doctors in our local hospitals.

The Queensland Resources Council modelling indicates in the Warrego electorate the resources industry in 2014-15 provided \$1 billion in gross regional product and \$79 million in royalties. The state government's own budget papers under 'Economic snapshot' for the outback region show that agricultural production was \$1.9 billion in the region during 2014-15. Given what the Warrego electorate produces for the state from just two of the industries, it is clear we are not getting our fair share in return from this state government.

This budget sees taxes and charges increasing at twice the inflation rate—increasing the tax take to \$2,697 per person. The Queensland Government's Statistician Office states that in 2014-15 the average weekly earnings of a Queenslanders was \$1,448. If we put these figures in perspective, every Queenslanders works approximately nine working days to pay their state government taxes and charges.

I have been keeping a watching brief on the Warrego Highway upgrade program, which comprises 15 projects between Toowoomba and Miles that are planned to be delivered by June 2019. The Warrego Highway upgrades were developed and first announced two years ago by the former LNP government in partnership with the federal coalition government. It has been pressure from local

community groups, like the Chinchilla Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the community and me, who have kept these projects on the balance sheet. However, the Jingi Jingi bridge construction and approaches project has had a \$12 million deferral in this state budget. The Queensland Transport and Roads Investment Program showed last year that in the financial year 2016-17, \$20 million was to be spent on this project. QTRIP this year shows that only \$8 million will be spent on the project; therefore, \$12 million has been deferred in one year. I am a regular driver over the existing Jingi Jingi bridge, like many of my constituents, and I understand why it is in need of replacement sooner rather than later. It is disappointing that the state government do not share the road users' safety concerns.

Recently I visited the wonderful community of Inglestone and drove a long section of the Meandarra-Talwood Road. The Inglestone area is a very productive cropping and cattle country, and the Meandarra-Talwood Road is the main freight route for grain coming from New South Wales to the feedlots at Condamine. Most of this road is about five metres wide. The edges of the bitumen are disintegrating, and on some sections the gravel used to build up the shoulders to the bitumen is sharp and unsuitable for this purpose. One landholder advised me he has expended some \$30,000 on tyres that have disintegrated because of the road and the gravel. There are school buses that operate on this road, and I am concerned for the children's safety and that of other road users. There is an urgent need to further allocate sufficient funding to address the unsafe road shoulders. I have inquired to the department who advise there is no maintenance funding for this purpose. However, they will do their best to try to do something—and I know they will—but they do need the support of the state government to help them with funding for this purpose. This road needs to have an ongoing program of widening to improve the safety of the road. I will work with the community to achieve this outcome.

Last year during the budget speech, I raised on behalf of a constituent, Randal Newsham, the condition of the Bollon to St George road. I am pleased to advise that due to my representations there has been a road roughness assessment on the Balonne Highway between Bollon and St George. Maintenance works will now be undertaken to address the bumps and depressions along this stretch of the highway. I look forward to Mr Newsham's report in relation to those works. There is still more work to do to complete the humps on the levee bank on the Balonne Highway and to ensure that the town of Bollon is completely flood proofed. I have also tabled a petition in the parliament demonstrating how important this matter is to the community of Bollon. I will continue to press the government for these capital works.

The communities of Mitchell and Morven were buoyed in April this year with the announcement of \$2.5 million to upgrade the rail sidings on the western line in conjunction with the reopening of the old branch line to support the expansion of the Oakey Beef Exports. Reports indicated the government wanted the department to start planning immediately and begin upgrades within six months. With such urgency on the government's part, I would have thought we would have seen this project as a separate line item in the budget. However, this does not appear to be the case. It would give great confidence to those communities if there was actually a line item for that project.

Another rail project that is very important to the Warrego electorate is that of the Toowoomba Range capacity and clearance project to deepen the rail tunnels on the Toowoomba Range. The budget paper notes are very revealing on this project. The total project cost advised by TMR was \$58 million, but the current total estimated cost based on a reduced scope is \$34 million. This is another vital infrastructure project experiencing a funding reduction from the Labor state government. This project is yet to start under this government.

As many are aware, the state government has announced a \$70 million replacement of the Roma Hospital through the \$180 million Enhancing Regional Hospitals Program. I welcome this announcement and acknowledge the advocacy by the former LNP health minister and member for Southern Downs. I note that the replacement program was so far progressed that the incoming Labor government was unable to unwind the commitment. Looking through Budget Paper No. 3 and in particular page 99, I welcome the \$27 million listed in the budget for the Enhancing Regional Hospitals Program. However, it would give much more confidence to the communities to see a specific line item for the Roma Hospital replacement, given that other hospital redevelopments with lesser amounts of expenditure are expressed in this manner. This budget has also missed an opportunity to start the planning for the rebuild of the Charleville Hospital. This hospital is still located in a flood prone area and the difficulties that are experienced with legionella in the old pipework with warm bore water should be compelling reasons to progress the planning and the replacement of this hospital.

Last year there was no mention of agriculture in the Treasurer's speech. This year at least there was an acknowledgement and a mention. I would also like to welcome the extension of the family farm transfer duty concession for family transfer of farm businesses. This is a good outcome for primary producers. It is disappointing, however, to read that the agriculture budget has been reduced by 2.5 per cent.

There is an urgent need for more research funding for pimelea poisoning of cattle. Primary producers in the Warrego electorate have had stock losses into the millions of dollars. Pimelea thrives on winter rains around the St George district, which I understand we are about to get a bit more of over the weekend. It is a highly poisonous native plant found in Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory. It is essential that the state government fund more research to fully understand the chemical analysis and combine this with animal trials. It will be an expensive process. However, it will provide major benefits to the cattle industry in Queensland and across the country.

I am disappointed by the state Labor government spending on vegetation management compliance officers. As we heard earlier from the member for Hinchinbrook, there is a \$7.8 million allocation to secure high-resolution satellite imagery coverage of Queensland. I would have no problem with that if it was focused on actually correcting the inaccuracies in the existing maps. However, it is clear that the government intend to target farmers and landowners managing vegetation on their properties and treat them again like criminals. There is no doubt the intention is to reinstate the tree police within the Department of Natural Resources and Mines and send them out, as I do find them at the moment, harassing farmers and their families. It is bad enough that primary producers are denied the use of the tools of their trade by the government refusing category H weapons licences for pistols; but now primary producers will be treated like criminals again by the eye in the sky.

Across the Warrego electorate there are a number of auxiliary fire and rescue stations to be replaced at Roma, Tara, Charleville and Cunnamulla, and they are listed in the budget papers. What is equally important is that local contractors and builders be able to tender for the construction of these stations. They are not complex builds; they are good projects that support local jobs. I have asked the Parliamentary Library to search for the prequalification system for local builders and contractors as I have been advised there are no builders west of Toowoomba on that particular list. Each one of these stations listed for replacement is west of Toowoomba. The Parliamentary Library advised that the prequalified contractors list is, in fact, secret. Secret or not, I will be checking on each one of these projects and, if the locals do not get the opportunity to tender, it will show that the government is not supporting local jobs in the electorate of Warrego.

The Wallumbilla State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Brigade is seeking funding—some \$245,000—to construct the first stage of the combined emergency service centre in Wallumbilla. I was greatly disappointed by the response from the Minister for Police when I wrote to him about funding for this project. His department suggested the SES and the Rural Fire Brigade should seek funding from community grants from the likes of Suncorp and the Queensland Country Credit Union. This is an unsatisfactory response from the government. I urge the government to look at the amazing job these volunteers do at Wallumbilla, especially the road crash unit. It is a very worthy project and the state government should be helping them out financially with this project.

The budget brings me to one of the programs I have championed for many years, Royalties for the Regions. In 2014 the LNP Royalties for the Regions investment in the Warrego electorate was a total of \$120 million: the state government contribution of over \$43 million, another \$52 million from the private sector and \$25 million from local governments. The LNP was only elected in 2012. In two years the LNP delivered a total of \$120 million worth of projects in the electorate of Warrego. Let us contrast that against Labor's Building our Regions program: a \$70 million budget allocation last year but only \$400,000 of that budget was actually spent across the state.

I think we can clearly see where the problem is with the Building our Regions program. It is frozen with the Labor state government, which is why the LNP has committed to restore a \$495 million Royalties for Regions program to replace the smaller, shorter, narrower and frozen program of the Labor government. The LNP will restore jobs and confidence to rural and regional Queensland with a real Royalties for Regions program and we will make sure it is unfrozen.