




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

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APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 2)

 **Mr WHITING** (Murrumbidgee—ALP) (3.55 pm): I also rise to speak in favour of the Appropriation Bill (No. 2). When first reading the bill, I was reminded that people often ask me about the differences between council and parliament. Often I say that it is the same process, just different issues. The issues I deal with now include SPERs and schools, instead of barking dogs and footpaths. However, one very similar process that occurs is adjusting the financial statements, which is what we are doing today. We are moving money to cover emergent spending. Often councils move hundreds of thousands dollars; in this place, it can be hundreds of millions of dollars.

The bill features expenditure within the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services with \$400 million being reallocated, which is great to see. It is great to see how we are prioritising services that protect the most vulnerable Queenslanders. The number of investigations that we have commenced is up, with 1,772 more, totalling 20,442. The number of finalised investigations is also up, with 848 more, totalling 19,799. Our front-line staff have achieved that even while undertaking 683 more investigations over the past 12 months. We are turning the corner and getting through more investigations. The additional 129 staff—a much lauded initiative from the Palaszczuk government—will have an impact in future quarters when they are fully rolled out. There are ads in the papers and online right now calling for that staff. The growth in foster care certainly continues as well. The number of foster-care families continues to rise, with an extra 175 carer families in Queensland compared to the same period last year. It is great to see that we can support the wonderful work of the department of child safety and the Palaszczuk government through this Appropriation Bill.

It is good to see the Department of Energy and Water Supply featured in the bill, with nearly \$400 million being allocated. It is great to see all the government initiatives coming through this department. I will outline a few. We have \$51 million from the Australian Renewable Energy Agency for six large-scale commercial solar projects in Queensland. Over 50 per cent of the Arena funding went to Queensland. Those six projects are worth over \$600 million and they will generate 300 megawatts of solar power. The projects include the Whitsunday Solar Farm, the Kidston Solar Project, the Oakey Solar Farm, the Longreach Solar Farm, the Darling Downs Solar Farm—with 100 megawatts, that is the largest in the nation—and the Collinsville Solar Farm. They will create more than 500 construction jobs and hundreds of jobs indirectly. Once again, the good work of the department and the Palaszczuk government is being supported through this Appropriation Bill.

We are in a position to better manage the funds in this budget because of the sturdy stewardship of the Treasurer and the Palaszczuk Labor government. The growing strength of our budget approach is being recognised by independent external agencies. Let us look at what the Treasurer said earlier. Deloitte Access Economics Investment Monitor for the September quarter 2016 has forecast growth of 3.7 per cent for 2016-17 and 3.9 per cent for 2017-18. That is broadly consistent with the state budget forecast of four per cent and 3.5 per cent, and is in line with other private forecasts. As members have

heard us say today, Queensland should record nation-leading growth—I repeat: nation-leading growth—from 2016-17 through to the end of DAE’s forecast period in 2025-26. During October, S&P Global Ratings reaffirmed Queensland’s AA-plus credit rating, citing the very strong economy, strong financial management and budgetary performance, and low contingent liabilities. S&P noted that our recent budgets delivered surpluses by controlling spending in the face of revenue writedowns. On a number of occasions today, we heard that the rating agency Moody’s has published an update to its discussion of key credit factors for Queensland. That update reflects the AA1 credit rating and identifies improved results following a period of high deficits as a credit strength.

We have heard today that the member for Indooroopilly does not want to hear all this. He would rather cast aspersions on how debt is going under Labor. We heard that he would like to label our Debt Action Plan as heroic. Let me stress this truth. Debt management is going much better under Labor than it would have under those opposite. That is a fact that we see here in Queensland and see across the nation.

I have said in previous speeches that increasing debt is in the DNA of the LNP. Let us look at the record of debt under the LNP Campbell Newman government. Under the LNP Newman government debt increased by \$14 billion in three years, with a peak of \$43 billion in 2014-15. General government sector debt in 2016-17 is expected to be \$37.775 billion. That is \$10 billion less than projected in Tim Nicholl’s 2014-15 budget.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr WHITING: Yes, I do understand what \$10 billion less means. It is quite a good figure. Those opposite cannot argue the fact that interest costs will actually be \$800 million lower in 2016-17 than had been previously projected by the former government in 2014-15. They will be \$800 million lower.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr WHITING: As we can hear, they do not like it. They like to boast of their fiscal rectitude, but under the LNP, whether state or federal, debt goes up. I give members the Abbott government as a case in point. We heard the member for Maroochydore churning out lines about spiralling debt under Labor. One thing history shows us is that when we have an LNP government debt goes up. That is a fact.

They like to talk of economic doom and gloom—and previously they have labelled Queensland as the Spain of Australia—but they just cannot hide the fact that there is increasingly good news and growing economic confidence coming from Queensland. I also found it fascinating that the member for Indooroopilly criticised us for getting extra dividends from government owned corporations. We know that we would not get any dividends from the GOCs if they had sold them off. Those opposite would say goodbye to all those dividends if they ever got their hands on these GOCs.

Let me stress that these Queensland businesses are working hard for Queenslanders. They are working hard and making money which goes back into creating and supporting crucial services for Queenslanders—services that protect vulnerable children or make sure that they get the education they need to keep on building this great state. As the member for Indooroopilly noted, these Queensland businesses, owned by the people of Queensland, will have to keep on working hard and producing more dividends for the Queensland budget. We do not shy away from that.

There is another memorable phrase that the member for Indooroopilly uttered. Let me run this by members. He said we should ‘put a lid on expenses growth’. That is a phrase that will send a collective shiver up and down the spines of all Queenslanders, especially those working for the government. ‘Put a lid on expenses growth’ I would suggest, is code or a euphemism for cuts—cuts to jobs, conditions and wages. When we hear it again it shows that they have not moved on from the Campbell Newman days. Whenever they see a budget, they just want to cut it. Whenever they see a balance sheet, they just cannot wait to run a red pen through it. They just cannot help it. I commend the bill to the House.