




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

Record of Proceedings, 8 August 2017

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL:
HEALTH, COMMUNITIES, DISABILITY SERVICES AND DOMESTIC AND
FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION COMMITTEE**

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (9.51 pm): I rise to speak on and support the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee's report on the 2017-18 budget estimates process. The committee made one recommendation: that the proposed expenditure be agreed to. I acknowledge all committee members and those who came before the estimates committee for their work. I also acknowledge the secretariat and all ministers.

This year's estimates process examined some of the most vital services our government provides to Queenslanders. One of the most common themes that was apparent to me is that our most valuable asset is indeed our people—those dedicated front-line staff in these vital areas of service provision who provide care, compassion and skill to Queenslanders when they need them most.

In 2017-18 the Health budget is over \$16.5 billion. That represents an 8.4 per cent increase on the 2016-17 budget. It is apparent to me that we are building and maintaining the hospitals our communities need. Since being elected the Palaszczuk government has employed an additional 3,172 nurses, 1,191 doctors, 882 allied health professionals and 250 ambulance staff. This is in stark contrast to the Newman-Nicholls LNP government, which sacked thousands of front-line staff. It is apparent in this budget that the Palaszczuk government is investing in restoring our front-line services. This is something that we know is needed as our population both grows and ages.

Great work is being done in our hospitals and we have budgeted accordingly. There is \$126 million to continue to reduce specialist outpatient long waits; \$2 million for a suite of mental health initiatives for health professionals; and \$88 million under the Making Tracks investment strategy for Indigenous health initiatives. In Townsville we have our tertiary hospital and a great hospital and health service. I am pleased to see \$18.8 million growth funding to meet projected increases in activity, emergency department presentations and elective surgery. We will also complete the \$6.6 million expansion of the Townsville Hospital paediatric ward.

The Queensland Ambulance Service received a record budget of \$719 million. This funding will be used to recruit an additional 75 ambulance staff, taking the total to 250 since we were elected. There is \$16.9 million for planning and delivery of new and replacement ambulance stations and \$21 million for 150 new and replacement ambulance vehicles. I and the 44 staff at Kirwan Ambulance Station in the electorate of Thuringowa are pretty happy to see the delivery of the \$5 million redevelopment. I thank the health minister for that.

Child Safety is an absolute priority of the Palaszczuk government. That stands in stark contrast to the LNP, which sacked over 200 staff in Child Safety. Our government is again restoring these vital services. I commend Minister Fentiman for the \$200 million over four years to fund and support front-line workers in the child protection system including 236 child and family services staff, increasing to 292 in 2018-19. I am glad that the department is also addressing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in the child protection system.

The member for Hinchinbrook, who will speak after me, raised with Minister O'Rourke the cost of electricity. The hypocrisy of this member, who continued to question the minister on electricity prices, knows no bounds. He should remember the figure of 43 per cent. The LNP delivered nothing in terms of infrastructure, nothing in terms of electricity generation and nothing in terms of water.

As I said recently, \$690 million in infrastructure is budgeted—not pledged, as those opposite did—for water infrastructure and there is \$386 million for the Powering North Queensland Plan, which will see hydro-electricity generated on the Burdekin and, importantly, the building of a transmission line to connect all of those renewable energy projects like the \$225 million Ross Solar Farm in my electorate—or Clare or Collinsville or Kidston. The benefit of these projects is that they will create thousands of jobs. Our plan will increase local supply and put downward pressure on wholesale prices. We are generating North Queensland energy for North Queensland. We will keep prices down so that we do not experience the double-digit price increases we are seeing around the country. Why is that happening? It is because those opposite sold our assets.

I have said in this House before that anyone who opposes—the crossbenchers opposed it—the \$690 million budgeted for our city of Townsville should drive up to Townsville and tell us that we are not worth it. That is what they are effectively saying. I find it staggering that someone would oppose \$690 million of infrastructure for our city. They are effectively telling us that North Queenslanders do not deserve it. We do, and the Labor government of this state is delivering that infrastructure for the residents of Townsville.