




Speech By  
**Ann Leahy**

**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE  
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Ms LEAHY** (Warrego—LNP) (4.38 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the appropriation bills. I commend the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for their budget replies in the House yesterday. This is the opposition's opportunity to review and scrutinise how the state government has collected and expended taxpayers' money in hopefully a fair and equitable manner across the state.

This was supposed to be a budget about jobs. However, we see in the budget that employment growth is weaker and unemployment is forecast to stay higher for longer. This is a very disappointing budget for the outback region, particularly for the youth of the outback region as the unemployment rate for youth in the outback region sits at 48 per cent. Nearly half the youth in the outback region do not have a job—that is in places like Charleville, Cunnamulla, Quilpie and Thargomindah in my electorate.

The youth of the outback just want a future. They want some security and some hope, and they are not getting that from this government. There is one thing for sure: this is not a jobs budget for the youth of the outback. The youth of the outback are wary of budgets with glossy covers, because with a 48 per cent unemployment rate they know that this government is not delivering. The youth of the outback do not have access to public transport to get to work; they have to drive a car. That is why the LNP's freeze on the family car registration for three years will help ease the cost-of-living pressure on these young people. It will help families in regional areas who rely on the family car to take the children to school or the doctor or to travel to and from work because there is no public transport. These people cannot catch a ferry, a train or a bus. Those services just do not exist in most of the communities in my electorate.

This budget is one of debt and unprecedented debt. Over the next four years, the state government debt is forecast to balloon by \$9 billion up to \$81 billion. It might be of interest to this House to know that when Paul Keating left office he left a national debt of \$96 billion. It took 10 years for the whole nation to pay back his debt—that was the whole nation, not just Queensland. Queensland is now heading for this level of debt. We cannot afford it and we will be paying it off for years to come. The interest bill will stifle infrastructure spending and new service provision. The interest on this debt will remain at about \$3.6 billion, or almost \$10 million a day. There are 192 days until Christmas this year, which means that a distance of 1,920 kilometres of road will not be built between now and Christmas because the interest bill has to be paid.

Let me put that in perspective. The cost of building a new dual carriageway road from Brisbane to Quilpie and back again will be paid out in interest payments between now and Christmas. Every day this government fails to manage and reduce the debt is a day that taxpayers' money cannot be spent on infrastructure and delivering roads or services because this money is being spent on interest payments.

For three budgets, I have looked for the words 'agricultural profitability' in the Treasurer's budget speech. In the first budget, agriculture did not even rate a mention in the Treasurer's speech. Last year, it snuck in there with an acknowledgement of agriculture. At least this year there is a mention of agricultural assets. However, the funding for the agricultural portfolio did not fare so well, with a reduction of \$14 million. AgForce described this state budget as 'underwhelming' for the agricultural industry, which is one of the pillars of so many regional communities across my electorate.

This funding reduction is not good news for cattle producers who are battling against drought and also pimelea poisoning. I wish to thank the member for Burdekin, who has been on the ground with landholders affected by pimelea in my electorate and strongly supporting the call for funding to develop a probiotic for cattle affected by pimelea. I am also pleased to advise the House that some funding has been secured through Meat and Livestock Australia, producers and AgForce for initial research projects running until December 2017. Options to fund additional pimelea research beyond 2017 are needed, and I call on the Queensland government to contribute financially to the ongoing research project with a cash injection to pimelea research beyond 2017.

There is no doubt that agriculture needs water. Landholders, particularly those in my electorate, are conscious of the need to conserve water from the Great Artesian Basin. The \$8 million allocation from the federal government, which Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce announced in my electorate at Roma, is most welcome. However, the state government has only committed up to—and 'up to' are the important words—\$4 million in matching funding. I hope the Queensland government does not fall short on the GAB because of this wishy-washy commitment from the state government. I might also add that we did hear in this parliament this week something about the Abbott government and the Great Artesian Basin. Let me put on the record that it was Kevin Rudd who actually closed off and cancelled the funding for the Great Artesian Basin. It was Kevin Rudd; it had nothing to do with Tony Abbott.

I turn to the impacts of this budget on the outback region capital program, which has been savaged with a 31 per cent reduction. The Darling Downs capital program has been cut by 24 per cent. It is the regional areas that are producing coal royalty revenue increases of up to 80 per cent in 2016-17, but they are not receiving their fair share in return infrastructure projects. Capital spending is needed in the regional areas. There is ageing infrastructure that needs replacement, like hospitals, particularly the Charleville Hospital, and schools like Thargomindah. They need covered areas to protect their students and staff from temperatures of over 47 degrees in summer. Instead, we see projects like Cross River Rail being allocated more than \$2.9 billion—a project that will not carry one freight train. The capital funding for the regions is being siphoned off to the Cross River Rail project, despite promises from the Palaszczuk government that major projects would have a business case.

Talking of rail, in my electorate the Angellala Creek rail bridge was blown up in 2014. My constituents would like to see this do-nothing state government finalise the insurance claim for this rail bridge. The government has had 2½ years to do that insurance claim and to get it finalised and that still has not happened. No wonder South-West Queenslanders are not interested in the Cross River Rail because they are waiting for this do-nothing government to get on with the insurance claim for the Angellala Creek rail bridge. This was also echoed by AgForce, which said—

While there are billions of dollars set aside for road and rail projects in southeast Queensland, there appears to be no major new funding for regional and rural transport initiatives that would make it safer, easier and cheaper to get farm goods to market.

It's particularly disappointing there is no funding for an AgForce-backed rail freight infrastructure project in central and southern Queensland that would be a game changer for grain growers.

It would be a game changer for the many grain growers in my electorate. While I am talking of infrastructure, I was pleased to hear again from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in her budget reply that the LNP will restore the very popular \$500 million Royalties for the Regions program that will replace Labor's failed Building our Regions fund. I have championed the Royalties for the Regions program that delivers. I am pleased to see the LNP Royalties for the Regions program being championed again and again by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. I will give an idea of how the LNP Royalties for the Regions program delivers. In two years the LNP delivered a total of \$120 million of projects in the Warrego electorate. Let us contrast that against the Palaszczuk government's program that failed to deliver 89 per cent of the infrastructure promised in their first year. They failed to deliver.

**Mr Crandon:** Was that 89 per cent?

**Ms LEAHY:** Yes, 89 per cent of the infrastructure promised in the first year. This Labor government's Building our Regions program is a smoke-and-mirrors program compared to the real LNP Royalties for the Regions program that actually delivers.

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 hopefully before June 2019. I am pleased to see that the Jingi Jingi Creek bridge is completed. However, I cannot say that the Brigalow to Chinchilla widening project was as well managed. The Brigalow to Chinchilla project originally was meant to take nine months to complete. Instead, it took 16 months under this government. There has been a significant delay. I ask that no other Warrego Highway project be delayed, cut short of funding or managed like the Brigalow-Chinchilla project. The remainder of these projects are to be delivered by June 2019, and I wish to see all of them delivered in this time frame. I do not think there should be any more mess-ups, stuff-ups or delays like we saw with the Chinchilla-Brigalow project.

The regional roads budgets in the Darling Downs and the south-west have been slashed in this budget. When projects finish, there are no new road projects to do the essential works, like the widening of the Meandarra-Westmar road to make it safer for the school buses that travel on that road, or the Mitchell Saint George Road that supports the livestock and tourism industries, or addressing the terrible surface of the St George-Bollon road. What we see with projects that should be continued or replaced is that the money is being syphoned off to the Cross River Rail.

I am pleased to see that the LNP initiated \$70 million Roma Hospital redevelopment is recognised in the budget. I can advise the House that the old nurses quarters has been demolished and plans for the new hospital have been made available to the community.

**A government member** interjected.

**Ms LEAHY:** I take that interjection. It took the LNP to initiate it.

**Government members** interjected.

**Ms LEAHY:** The LNP started that project and it was Lawrence Springborg who visited on many occasions. I note that the budget papers state that this is one of the largest single government investments in Roma in many years and will be a huge boost to the local economy. I will correct that record somewhat, as it was the LNP government, through the Royalties for the Regions program, that built and finished stage 1 of the \$17 million levee bank in Roma and provided significant funding for stage 2.

I wish to raise another issue of importance to both the Warrego and Gregory electorates, which is food security for residents of communities such as Cunnamulla, Eulo, Yowah, Quilpie, Thargomindah, Eromanga and further west to Noccundra and out to Cameron's Corner. There is an existing subsidy for livestock and regional freight contracts to provide funding to support the movement of cattle via rail only and freight via road and rail to and from regional areas of Queensland. That subsidy is listed in the Budget Strategy and Outlook and in 2017-18 is projected to provide \$33.8 million. I am advised that Aurizon currently has the contract with the state government for the freight services in my electorate and those are currently delivered by road. I am advised that, despite liaising at length with Aurizon personnel for the previous six months, small local businesses in my electorate that use that service are very nervous. They are nervous that this freight subsidy will be reduced by stealth and the existing corporate customers and direct accounts will feel the brunt of any subsidy reduction.

I do not believe that Aurizon is being very helpful to south-west Queenslanders or those businesses that provide fruit and vegies and cold goods. I do not think Aurizon is ensuring that there is a smooth transition out of those services. The direct customers advise me that they are at risk with those services not being provided, as they are outside the existing contractual arrangements that extend beyond the government's contract. This has the capacity to adversely affect businesses and the availability of fresh fruit and vegies and cold goods to many south-west communities. Changes have been proposed as to how this contract will operate in the future. Submissions have been called and they are under review. There are some six months left of the existing contract, so now it is time for the department to finalise the review, do the consultation and make sure we have that certainty for the communities of south-west Queensland. I look forward to achieving a workable outcome with businesses to ensure that food security and quality for those communities is maintained. I hope the government will assist in doing that without increasing the cost of living.