



Speech By
Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

Record of Proceedings, 14 June 2018

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

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (12.31 am): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Appropriation Bill 2018. As in previous years, I opened the budget pack with eager anticipation of the investments and infrastructure projects for the electorate of Condamine that would be contained within it. Yet again, despite a much heralded budget surplus, the residents of the electorate of Condamine and I were greeted with disappointment. The announcements made in the budget for the seat of Condamine have been made in the last budget, the one before that and, for some of them, the one before that. They are current projects that are mostly well on their way. There is nothing new. There is nothing for a part of Queensland that is growing rapidly. In fact, some areas of my electorate are outgrowing the current infrastructure that is available and this government has no plans for that growth.

The educational requirements for the growing population of my electorate is just one issue that needs urgent attention. After listening to the Deputy Premier, our Treasurer, one would think that she delivered an economic miracle. In her budget speech the Treasurer stated—

Today I can announce that we expect a surplus of \$1.512 billion in 2017-18—more than three times the size of the Mid-Year Fiscal and Economic Review forecast.

The Treasurer stated further—

Our responsible budget management is part of this success story.

The Treasurer is well aware of the real reason the budget is in surplus and it is definitely not down to the few months that the Deputy Premier has been in the role of Treasurer. The real reason for this success story is that the state is swimming in royalties from the coalmining industry. It is interesting to note that nowhere in the Treasurer's speech is coalmining even mentioned—not even briefly. One would have thought that an industry that has played such a large part in delivering the surplus to Queensland would have been front and centre in the budget speech. Indeed, one would have expected the Treasurer to begin her speech with a cry of, 'God bless coal.' Instead, it did not receive a mention.

Perhaps the Treasurer is a little embarrassed by her predicament, particularly given her well-published green credentials. We are all fully aware of the Deputy Premier's zeal in pursuing green votes during the election campaign. That zeal was further evidenced during the recent debate on the vegetation management legislation with her fervent enthusiasm for the renewable energy target.

It must be hard to reconcile the need for cash for pet projects such as Cross River Rail with the discomfort of knowing that such projects would not be achievable without the royalties stream that is flowing in from the coalmining industry. Perhaps in her rush to splash cash around the electorates held by the Labor Party, the Treasurer has forgotten where the money is coming from.

Unfortunately for Queenslanders, under a Labor government, economic growth is weak, employment growth is falling and unemployment has been revised to stay higher for longer. In regional Queensland, youth unemployment is at a crisis point and regional jobs are difficult to find with this government investing little in infrastructure to create employment outside the south-east corner or on the coastal fringes.

For her first budget the Treasurer has provided one full of taxes, debt and unemployment. In fact, there is \$2.25 billion in new taxes and fees for Queenslanders over the next four years. Even with those new taxes and the massive boom in resource royalties, somehow the Labor government has managed to have a debt bill of \$83 billion, meaning an interest bill of \$3.7 billion each and every year—\$7,000 a minute, or over \$420,000 an hour, \$10 million a day, \$71 million a week—that our children and grandchildren will need to pay back.

Infrastructure creates employment, which stimulates our economy. That is a simple message that Labor just does not seem to get. It talks up infrastructure spending, but fails to deliver it. In the 2017-18 budget, Labor failed to invest \$532 million into promised infrastructure projects. Under Labor's Made in Queensland program, no new funding has been allocated in the 2018-19 fiscal year for the Queensland manufacturing industry. During the election campaign the Premier talked up supporting Queensland businesses, but it is a different story now. What about putting Queensland jobs first? That is yet another broken promise.

Queensland has the highest car registration charges in Australia. What a great claim to fame for motorists who are already suffering from cost-of-living pressures. The cost of owning the family car is now becoming beyond the means of some families. When in government, the LNP froze registration charges and that was one of its election promises in November 2017. This budget contains an additional \$40 million in traffic fines and confirms that the Labor government is using speed cameras as cash cows and not for road safety purposes.

In some areas of the Condamine electorate there is massive population growth, particularly those areas south-west of Toowoomba. Currently, for children in those areas, once they reach year 7 there are no secondary school options. They are required to travel to Toowoomba to attend either state schools, which are already struggling with large numbers of students, or private schools. The increasing number of developments in these areas means more families and, with families, comes secondary school-age children.

None of these population increases have been addressed by the current Labor government to plan for the future of these communities. There is not even funding for a business plan in the budget to assist in assessing the future educational requirements of these areas. Investing in our children's education is the best way we can ensure that they have the reading, writing and numeracy skills so that they have the opportunity to study further or get a job and be successful in life. Under this Labor government's watch, achieving successful educational outcomes for Queensland children has not been realised. There are 35 schools in the seat of Condamine and there is not one dollar in this budget for any of them.

Health is important to all of us, whether we are young, old, or have a family. The Labor government talks about a record investment in health, but it has failed to deliver \$115.5 million of the Queensland Health capital projects that it promised in 2017-18. Under the Labor government, categories 1, 2 and 3 emergency patients all missed important targets about being seen within recommended clinical time frames. Those are patients with immediate, imminent or potentially life-threatening injuries. Heaven help those waiting in the public system for hip replacements or cataract operations. The Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service has a forecast operating deficit for 2018-19 of \$7.68 million, despite being in surplus previously.

When the LNP was in government, we ended centralised control of Queensland Health by creating 16 local hospital and health boards across Queensland to enable local communities to manage their health needs. The LNP reopened maternity services so that mothers could have their babies close to their communities and families, rather than having to travel long distances to bigger centres where they did not have the support of family and friends. Under the LNP, ambulance ramping was reduced by over 20 per cent and we cleared Labor's long dental waitlists, under which some patients had to wait over two years to see a dentist.

The men and women who provide our front-line emergency services are always there when we need them—but perhaps they will not be any more if Labor's budget cuts are any indication. The total cut to the Queensland Police Service is \$44.6 million, which means less money to the front-line services

that protect us and serve our communities. That is being done at a time when crime rates continue to rise across Queensland. In response to a question on notice to the police minister that I submitted on 3 March 2018, figures indicate that police recruit numbers have declined over the past three years. Labor made an election commitment to Queenslanders to provide an additional 535 police officers. We intend holding them to that promise.

In this Labor budget, small business owners have been slugged with a new waste tax that will cost them and their customers \$1.3 billion over the next four years. Small business is the engine room of our economy, creating the majority of jobs. The best that the Labor government can do is stifle their businesses by introducing more taxes and continuing to generate even more red tape.

Over the past decade electricity prices have risen by over 60 per cent above inflation. Average householders are struggling to pay that exorbitant rise in electricity costs and, to save money, pensioners are not turning on their heaters or air conditioners. When in government the LNP supported Queensland farmers and businesses by capping price increases on obsolete and transitional tariffs at 10 per cent. The Labor government has continued to slug all electricity users and has no plan to reduce electricity prices.

Agriculture underpins our economy and the electorate of Condamine is a prime example of that. We have everything from broadacre farming and intensively farmed irrigation areas growing grains, pulses and cotton to one of the largest intensive livestock industries in Australia and a diverse horticultural sector. However, there is nothing in the budget for agriculture from this government. I should not be surprised, as Labor has never understood the value of our primary producers or the rural and regional communities that they support. Labor has showered money on their green mates, providing the Australian Conservation Council with \$1.8 million of public funding, whilst ignoring the farmers who have been left to fend for themselves after the unfair and devastating vegetation management laws. Labor has never been a friend of agriculture or primary producers and that trend continues with this Treasurer's budget. The CEO of AgForce, Mike Guerin, said of the budget—

Agriculture is one of the pillars of the Queensland's economy and the fastest growing industry in Australia, but has been largely forgotten in a State Budget focused more on big spending infrastructure initiatives in the south-east corner.

In conclusion, this budget is another nothing budget: it does nothing for rural and regional Queensland, nothing for struggling families and nothing to improve our economy. The Condamine electorate has roads that are in total disrepair and require major reconstruction. In our schools student numbers are rising rapidly, but no new infrastructure is planned. In fact, there is no plan for the future at all. Tourism venues are in need of funding to continue the good work of volunteers and bring visitors to our region to spend money while they are there. Youth unemployment is at a critical stage. There are rises in violent crime and increases in drug and alcohol abuse, to name a few worthy causes in need of funding.

Despite all that, this Labor government will spend \$17.3 million to extend a three-metre wide cycleway from Birdwood Road in Holland Park to Gaza Road in Tarragindi, which is a distance of under three kilometres, with a total of spend of \$45 million. I hope the honourable Joe Kelly, the member for Greenslopes, and the Hon. Mark Bailey, the member for Miller and Minister for Main Roads and Transport, will enjoy riding their bikes along that cycleway. That money would go a long way towards repairing the notorious Bowenville Norwin Road, where the speed limit has been reduced to 60 kilometres an hour due to the hazardous conditions of the road. The road is not fit to ride a bike along, yet a school bus goes along that road twice a day.

I cannot finish without expressing my horror at the tax grab that is the betting tax. A 15 per cent betting tax would make it the highest betting tax in not only Australia but also the world. Condamine is home to one of the largest racehorse and thoroughbred breeding regions in the country. Under this government, confidence in the industry is already at rock bottom. This is a high-taxing, high-debt, high-risk budget, which is what we have come to expect from this government.