




Speech By
Stephen Andrew

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

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

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (7.52 pm): In response to the handing down this week of the 2018-19 budget, I would like to commend the Queensland government and express my sincere thanks for the delivery of those important projects that fall within my electorate—the ones that I have been advocating for since the start of my term as the member for Mirani. It is promising to see that critical projects, such as the Rookwood Weir, have been given consideration in the Queensland state budget. It is also promising to see that vital funding for local governments in the Mirani electorate has also been budgeted for under the Works for Queensland program, which will see local communities boosted with local projects.

However, as promising as that is, as the member for Mirani I think so much more can be done to deliver a results focused budget for regional communities when it comes to raising the living standards of those who are disadvantaged or with limited employment prospects, the rising cost of the living, the casualisation of work and a predominant labour hire workforce, the cost of essential services, the impost of new water and waste taxes, and the burdens placed on those in the farming sector, who also grapple with the cost of living with no relief from exorbitant electricity costs and restrictions on how they can effectively manage their water and land. These are just a handful of the issues that the state budget does not address. The budget does not address how the state and the nation can face some of the biggest challenges of our time.

Although I commend the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services for his dedication and push for record spending in Health, it is somewhat insulting to the electors that the Minister for Health can attribute the need for record spending in Health on drinking, smoking and eating without looking deeper into the underlying factors that contribute to that much needed spending in health services. It would be helpful to understand the myriad other issues that contribute to the health of the population, particularly that of people in regional areas, who experience many disadvantages.

High unemployment levels, few job prospects, the casualisation of the workforce and a lack of government assistance to bring major projects to fruition are heavily impacting on the health of people in regional areas, particularly in my electorate of Mirani. In one town in my electorate alone, in December 2017 the unemployment rate was 20.9 per cent. That is undeniably affecting the health of the people in that area. Recently, I have been in talks with the local meatworks company and I have donated my old vehicle to provide transport to several jobseekers who were finding it difficult just to get themselves to and from work. There is not the luxury of public transport—trains and buses to catch—in some of the regions of Central Queensland.

In relation to Skilling Queenslanders for Work, I am afraid to say that some of the regions in my electorate missed the boat in offerings and incentives. That gap needs to be bridged. To be out of work with no possible way to make a two-hour trip to get to and from work means that many people experience unemployment and effects on their health, such as mental illness, substance abuse and poor diet. If people do not work, they do not eat correctly.

I note that the budget included many millions for the Back to Work program in South-East Queensland, but there was no allocation for this program for Central and North Queensland. The smaller communities in Central and North Queensland need as many people as possible to hold consistent and long-term, stable employment to at the very least keep money circulating through all the small local businesses that coexist to create a vibrant and healthy community. Indeed, a great deal of opportunity presents for those who live in these small communities to participate in building the schools and health facilities that are needed to accommodate a growing and aging population. There is much potential for development within the regions and so much more that can be delivered to generate local domestic projects and activities, including training opportunities for all no matter where they reside.

I have heard the Premier speak of providing opportunities for young people seeking entry into the workforce through apprenticeships and traineeships. These young people should receive preference when looking for work in regional areas and not backpackers from overseas. More needs to be done to ensure that local contractors take on major projects instead of workers being sourced from subsidiary overseas companies, or those with vested interests.

My predecessor promised Sarina Hospital \$16 million in funding. For my electorate to be overpromised and underdelivered adds further to people's socio-economic disadvantage. The mounting pressure on our public health system makes this funding a life-or-death matter. Breadcrumbs over four years is just not enough. Health insurance premiums continue to increase at a rate so far above the rate of inflation that my constituents are simply opting out of the private health system, placing added pressure on the public system. A lack of bulk-billing and cuts to after-hours healthcare services in the Mirani electorate means that my constituents simply cannot afford to visit a doctor. If they visit a doctor, they are told that their condition falls outside the realm of the public health system and that they should look into getting private health insurance. That is a hard fate for a person who has been out of work owing to a life-threatening disease. It is a vicious cycle.

Socio-economic disadvantage also influences educational opportunity at every stage of the learning and development of children in my electorate. It is known that there is a higher level of socio-economic disadvantage in regional or rural electorates than in city electorates. Electorates such as Mirani continue to be overlooked. More spending to facilitate improved services for people in the regions is a must. I am thankful for the \$91,000 in the budget for the First 5 Forever program, which helps families with children up to the age of five with early learning.

I wish the government had consulted me or the educators in my electorate as to what is really needed in this budget by way of support for people in my community who are socially disadvantaged for many reasons. Recently, during informal talks with principals in my area, I was informed that there is a concerning trend among prep-aged students. Approximately 50 per cent of those children are presenting with difficulties in reading, writing and basic social skills. In an electorate that spans 63,000-plus square kilometres with dozens of schools, how far can just \$91,000 in funding for the First 5 Forever program really go?

We need to invest in early education programs that identify the needs of children and increase the number of specialist educators to take pressure off teachers who are trying to deal with those issues in the classrooms. That is a growing concern. Ultimately, substandard education delivered from early childhood leads to future employment issues. I have spoken with local bus contractors who tell me that many prep-aged students are being dropped to empty homes as their parents have to work around the clock just to survive and pay their power bills, often without job security. Surely more money can be budgeted for an investment in the specialised education that children need to excel and programs so that their patients can afford after-school care and other state school programs.

Further on the topic of education, although I scrolled through the service delivery documents I did not come across any mention of the Sarina State High School as one of the 17 schools that will receive the \$10 million that the Palaszczuk Labor government promised if re-elected. That \$10 million promise was made as part of the Renewing Our Schools initiative to spend \$235 million across 17 schools that are more than 30 years old. As I scrolled through the budget papers, Sarina State High School was not mentioned as one of those 17 schools. A *Daily Mercury* article, written just after the

announcement of those promises and pledges, refers to a study conducted on regional schools. It states—

... regional school students were less likely to graduate high school than Brisbane children and called on the Labor Party and the LNP to change that and give our kids the best chance at success.

The problem facing Sarina State High School has not been the age of the buildings necessarily but the number of classrooms.

Hopefully that is an oversight. Since 2013, enrolments at Sarina State High School have increased by almost 30 per cent. Those wishing to study specialised subjects, such as digital media studies, are forced to travel to Mackay because such subjects are not taught at the school. It is hoped that the promised \$10 million is delivered to Sarina State High School in a timely manner and not in four years time. How is it justifiable to make such commitments to the public at election time and then seemingly withdraw them when the budget is presented for another couple of years?

My seat of Mirani surrounds the major regional population centres of Mackay and Rockhampton. Much of its transport network links with the economic lifeblood of the Sunshine State—that is, the Bowen Basin. While I applaud the actions taken to have the Marian intersection fixed, it needs to happen in the next 12 months under the promise to 'fix roads sooner'. To be honest, having to wait another two years to fix the Marian intersection would be disappointing, given that the route handles virtually all the giant over-dimension loads destined for coal mines in the Bowen Basin and especially given talk about the next big mining boom. That extraordinary task will not cease until the Walkerston bypass is commissioned, but how many years will it be before that happens? Will it be four years? Who knows!

The nearby community of Walkerston continues to see 100 or more B-double trailers and other oversized trucks thunder through town 24/7, moving bulk diesel to mines, yet both major parties have cited excuse after excuse as to why construction cannot begin on the Walkerston bypass. It should not matter what party is in power; what matters is the safety of road users. Anyone passing through Walkerston will know that on the main arterial road is a school that is directly in the path of those trucks. We have already had one near miss. The bypass is imperative for the safety of the community. If sensible logic were applied, the Walkerston bypass and the Mackay Ring Road, which share some common infrastructure, would be commissioned together. I suggest that that happens sooner rather than later.

I am thankful, as I suspect local residents are, for the extra allocation of funding to the Sarina Range Crossing, which appears to be on a reconstruction go-slow. Although it is the backup to the accident-prone Peak Downs Highway, the Sarina Range Crossing was completely destroyed during Cyclone Debbie and for over a year the road closure has affected many families living in the Sarina hinterland. Much can be said about the roads in my electorate that need attention sooner rather than later. People who travel to and from Mackay over the Koumala Range constantly face danger, either from traffic coming from the opposite direction or because of the road condition itself. When a truck crashed on the Eton Range closing the road for 24 hours, people from the Mackay region travelling west to the mines had to use the lengthy and hazardous dirt detour over the Koumala Range. The first man on the scene should be given a carton of beer or a medal for heroism, because he pulled the driver from the burning truck. Again, much can be said about the quality of works and the safety of roads in my electorate.

If Queensland expects to get ahead economically, the south-east cannot do it on its own, because much of our export wealth is generated by the communities in the regions. We forget the men and women who risk their lives travelling on second-rate roads to contribute to the state's wealth. We forget those in the gaps who find it hard to find stable employment and work. Those people miss out on their share of the state's wealth. I believe that we need to ensure that the most important and often only available transport linkages, such as those through my regional seat of Mirani, are up to the task so that we can all prosper. There is no denying that across the greater region we have many roads and rail projects in the pipeline, but progress seems to be held up by the do-we-or-don't-we approach. The elephant in the room is the Adani Carmichael coal project. The Deloitte Access Economics business outlook for 2018 states that we have \$28 billion worth of projects either set to go ahead or under construction, but a huge proportion of those projects are hanging on whether Australia's largest coal mine goes ahead.

If we are to look to Queensland's future, government leaders should be getting serious about water infrastructure. Whilst I commend the funding of the Rookwood Weir, we need to start looking at water resources and forward-thinking projects, which should be listed as critical infrastructure, for the benefit of the people not just of Mirani but also of the entire state and nation. Water is the lifeblood of agriculture. I remind members that half of our state is still drought declared. If we do not have a robust and healthy agricultural industry, if we cannot produce food or we lose the ability to generate export income, we will lose ourselves as a state and a nation.

In terms of the budget, much is written and spoken about spending on the Great Barrier Reef. Many of the bills we pass refer to climate change and environmental impacts on the state. If we are as serious as we suggest about climate change and drought, there is so much that we can do. While water legislation makes arrangements for multinational corporations to be exempted from the National Water Initiative, which was put in place to address population growth and climate change, we place many restrictions on the people of the land in terms of how they can access and use their water. Just recently, the Productivity Commission released a statement—

(Time expired)