




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BUTCHER** (Gladstone—ALP) (5.50 pm): The Palaszczuk government has delivered a budget for the regions, one that delivers jobs, jobs, jobs, but one that invests where it matters: in Health and in Education. That is certainly evident in the electorate of Gladstone. This budget delivers a record \$13.8 billion for education, including in the area of early childhood education. This budget delivers 185 extra teachers and 71 extra teacher aides which we know are so critical in our Central Queensland schools.

There are eight new schools opening in 2020 across the state, including one that I have fought hard for, the \$62 million Calliope State High School. Recently I visited the site with the Premier where work is proceeding full steam ahead. There will be students walking those halls next year and, importantly, no longer travelling on a packed school bus for a half-hour journey along the highway into Gladstone as those opposite would have had the kids continue to do, saying there was no need for that school. They had it up for sale. It was great to see that across the worksite there were over 100 people from local contractors such as local company Cutuli Electrical. In my electorate we will see a \$270,000 refurbishment of the science block at Tannum Sands State High School—I know how important that will be to those kids—and \$190,000 to upgrade the existing hardcourt at Benaraby State School and install a roof cover over it.

The Palaszczuk government's commitment to education is unwavering. We know that a quality education for our kids is paramount to the future of our great state and, more importantly, for their futures. This means we need to provide premier facilities and premier resources, we need to put enough teachers and teacher aides in our classrooms, and we need to recognise and appropriately reward our accomplished teachers. Our government is not just delivering record education investment in this budget, we are delivering investment in education all year round.

Right now in Gladstone at Toolooa State High School there is construction of a new building at a cost of \$4.2 million. At Clinton State School, where my nephew and nieces go, there is construction of more classrooms at a cost of \$1.3 million. There is also construction at Kin Kora State School at a cost of \$1 million to upgrade their hall to an all-weather-use facility. In fact, since I have been elected to this parliament the total investment in education infrastructure is just shy of \$100 million. We have supported our local schools and kindergartens through their P&Cs with close to half a million dollars in grants, including Gladstone West State School's refurbished tennis courts—which I know Rod Laver would be so proud of—and a new roof at Birralea Kindergarten to name only a few.

Labor budgets deliver for communities where it matters most: in education, in health and in jobs. During the coming year we will see the completion of the \$42 million accident and emergency department at the Gladstone Hospital. I acknowledge Minister Cameron Dick, who helped kick off that wonderful upgrade to that facility. Last week I was there checking out the progress. We are seeing the massive footprint of this new ED taking shape. The pylons are rising up out of the ground, the new car

park is complete and things are really starting to happen. The biggest share of our budget is invested in Health because all Queenslanders, no matter where they live, deserve access to good quality health care. We are seeing an increased demand on our public health services as health premiums continue to rise, pushing private insurance further and further out of reach for everyday Queenslanders. We cannot rely on the federal government to pay its fair share. Only the Palaszczuk Labor government is making the necessary investments in Health to meet this demand.

We are employing an extra 168 nurses and 95 extra doctors in Central Queensland and we have committed to making our nurse navigator positions permanent. This is great news for the two nurse navigators we have at Gladstone Hospital. These positions have made the world of difference to many patients and their families across Queensland but especially in regional communities like Gladstone. Often complex medical needs involve travel, time away from other kids and time off work. These are families who are desperately seeking answers. Having a nurse navigator to assist them in understanding the system, to streamline their case management and to, importantly, be a supportive ear is truly invaluable. Sue and Jan at the Gladstone Hospital are saints in my book and deserve the security that making these jobs permanent brings.

This budget is also delivering a massive \$62 million investment in suicide prevention. This is something I feel passionate about, as does every Queenslanders whose life has been touched by this kind of tragedy. Every death is one too many and Queensland's statistics are far too high. I recently met with my local Queensland police sergeant and discussed the prevalence of suicide in my region. To say the least, I was alarmed. It involves someone's father, sister, parent, child, friend or loved one. It is simply devastating. We need to be doing much more to make a dent in these high rates that we now see. This package includes many things, such as a new crisis care option being explored through the service reform project. I look forward to the outcome of this project to see if this is something that could be rolled out in Gladstone. We need to move this issue from our EDs and give the patient the specialised mental health support that they need at the time of crisis and beyond.

We have been fortunate in Gladstone to have the step-up step-down facility operating for six months now. This is a positive part of the mix, but it is only one part and we need to do more, especially in our response to acute critical presentations in Gladstone. I will continue to work with community members, mental health professionals and Minister Steven Miles to find a solution that fits the needs of the Gladstone community.

This package also allocates \$28.1 million over four years to enhance coverage over and above current investment for people living with severe and persistent mental illness who are ineligible for the NDIS. There is a gap here and patients have been falling through the cracks: being told by the public mental health system that they need to access support through their NDIS plans, but having no NDIS plan or a plan that does not cover their needs. I have had many people raise this concern with my office and I am thrilled that this budget will help to support those people.

Since the Palaszczuk government came into office 199,000 jobs—even more now—have been created. We on this side of the House are unashamedly pro jobs. Our government is continuing its investment: in programs that support unemployed Queenslanders getting a chance and in programs that provide incentives to businesses to take on a new employee. We are creating jobs in Gladstone, with 790 people employed under the successful Back to Work program through funding of \$7.2 million to date, with at least \$799,250 committed in 2019-20 to continue this program. I acknowledge Minister Fentiman. She has been a big driver behind this program. Three hundred and fifty-one employers have given hundreds of jobseekers in our region the opportunity to get a foothold in the local job market. We are building opportunities for people in Gladstone with the biggest changes to the payroll tax system in over a decade. Queensland already has one of the lowest payroll tax rates of any state in the country and these changes will make it even more competitive to do business, especially in regional Queensland.

We are investing in the industries of the future. My electorate of Gladstone is at the forefront of the global energy revolution of energy supply and reform. We have it all: coal, solar, gas, biofuels and now hydrogen. In Gladstone we are primed to capitalise on our assets: existing gas infrastructure, a deep water port and access to state development land. Our greatest asset is a visionary government with a strong and clear message. A clear energy policy gives business confidence to invest and they are doing just that. Members have heard me say it many times in this House: only Labor governments have the vision to invest in jobs for the future. I back coal, it has a place—it built my electorate—but we need to look forward. We need jobs in construction and industry that can bring the local people back to Gladstone. The \$19 million Hydrogen Industry Strategy sets out a five-year plan to drive development of an economically sustainable and competitive hydrogen industry in Queensland, creating more highly skilled jobs and export opportunities, with Gladstone being a key focus for hydrogen development. Global demand for hydrogen is increasing, with the market expected to reach US\$155 billion by 2022.

Finally, a word on our biggest employer and the driver of so much that is great in Gladstone, without which our town simply would not exist: the Gladstone Ports Corporation. This year's budget has seen investments in expansion at Auckland Point wharf for increasing containerisation and securing our cruise ship industry. The port of Gladstone is truly a multicommodity port, driving our resources sector, our tourism sector and our agricultural sector. Everywhere one looks in our region, community spaces are created and maintained by Gladstone Ports Corporation. The Palaszczuk government is investing in this profit-making, job-generating asset, an integral part of the economic prosperity for our region and our state.