




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (6.24 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the cognate debate of the 2019 budget bills. As the representative for the people of the Southern Downs, I would say that the greatest expression of a government's ability to deliver is their ability to manage the budget. No amount of civic conscience or social conscience alone will allow a government to deliver for the state of Queensland if it taxes highly, buries us in debt and makes a poor business environment for small businesses in Queensland. This is the view taken by the people in my electorate. It is the view of the bush. It is pragmatism. It is real-world, feet-on-the-ground practicality that drives that view. Therefore, this budget is not one for the people of Southern Downs.

I think that the Leader of the Opposition, Deb Frecklington, put it very well when she said this is a budget that delivers higher taxes, higher debt, fewer jobs and less infrastructure. What would we expect from a government that has backflipped so spectacularly on the Adani project and the opening up of the Galilee Basin? We saw the spectacle of a government that in the last few days of the last sitting, was quite proud of the fact that we were going to have a Bill Shorten government. I remember well that government members were in here tripping the light fantastic, lecturing us about what life would be like under a Bill Shorten government. When they failed to sniff the wind but realised the day after the election that they were not so popular, this project which the government said could not possibly be approved without letting it go through an independent process was flashed through in a matter of weeks. There is an example of the hypocrisy and the disingenuous talk of the government before and after. The people of Queensland understand that. They see it and they are not going to tolerate it.

On the economic front, our economy has stalled. Economic growth is flat at less than three per cent, which is substantially less than the long-term average of four per cent. Because of this, there are 26,000 fewer jobs expected by 2021-22 compared to last year's budget outlook. That is an example of the effects of poor economic management. Because of this perpetually high predicted unemployment rate, wage growth has been revised down every year across the forward estimates by as much as 0.75 per cent compared to last year's budget. I recall hearing numerous members to my left talking about how the lack of wage growth in our state is the fault of the Morrison government, like everything else they say. There is your reason. It is the local economic management in this state which is suppressing wage growth.

While the national unemployment rate remains low, the Palaszczuk Labor government has managed to buck the trend and keep Queensland unemployment consistently high. As of April, almost 160,000 Queenslanders were out of work. That is a massive economic and social problem. When Labor flogs the economy and wastes our hard-earned dollars, what do they do? They come after more. They come after our money—that is, the money of ordinary everyday Queenslanders. As sure as night follows day they will never ask, 'How can we spend the money we have better? How can we deliver more with the same money we have?' They always come after more. That is not what the people in my electorate of Southern Downs can do. If you are a farmer or a small business person or a worker, your wages are

not going up. Your takings are not going up. In fact, they are going down with the terrible effect of the drought at the moment. They have to make do with what they have. Why can't this government do the same with their money?

We have seen increased debt, land tax, vehicle registration, electricity dividends—they have reaped extraordinary dividends from the state owned generators which push up electricity prices—

Mr Minnikin interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Pause the clock. Order, member for Chatsworth! You are interrupting your own speaker.

Government members interjected.


Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not an invitation for members to laugh at that statement. It is a statement of fact.

Mr LISTER: We have seen increased mining royalties. We have seen the infamous waste tax—the \$1.3 billion impost on all of Queensland to fix the waste problems around Ipswich which were largely the fault of the old Labor mates in the old Ipswich City Council. It just goes on and on. This is a millstone around the productive neck of Queensland. It is taking money from ordinary productive Queenslanders and giving it to a government that spends the money poorly, and it is just wrong. We are heading to a massive debt bomb of \$90 billion. That is about \$19,000 for every man, woman and child in Queensland.

You have to ask: why is this necessary when Labor is benefiting from a massive coal royalties windfall and from having brought in new taxes and tax hikes? Why does this Labor government still have to increase debt to plug the budget black hole? We cannot live now without increasing debt. It begs the question: how are we going to live on the same amount in the future and pay the increased interest? It is a dilemma that ordinary Queenslanders understand very well, but this government does not seem to.

In terms of taxes, we are facing a higher payroll tax rate of 4.95 per cent for businesses with taxable wages of more than \$6.5 million a year, raising about \$544 million over four years. Again, this is taking money from the productive part of the economy. The modest cuts to the payroll tax for smaller businesses, whilst a step in the right direction, do not make up for this. Again, that is a millstone around the neck of the economy.

Total new taxes, which were not promised at the last state election, amount to \$1.25 billion over four years. This is on top of the \$2.2 billion from the last budget, so there is a staggering \$3.4 billion in more taxes since the Palaszczuk government was elected. That is \$3.4 billion taken away from Queenslanders, and it hurts. Debt is on track to hit over \$90 billion over the forward estimates.

 **Mr LISTER:** Before the break I was talking about debt. I would like to move on to roads, which are a very important thing in my electorate of Southern Downs. I have been trying, to little avail, to get this government to recognise the very poor state of the roads in Southern Downs. On a number of occasions I have raised the condition of the New England Highway, the Cunningham Highway, the Gore Highway—not named after Al Gore, but something we should spend our money on—the Accommodation Creek bridge, the Eight Mile overpass near Warwick, Stanthorpe Texas Road and Stanthorpe Inglewood Road. Most recently I visited the regional director in Toowoomba. I have to say that it was very kind of her to let me visit. I expressed my concern about the undulations in these roads, the cracking surfaces and the effects these have on the—

Mr Pegg interjected.

Mr LISTER: I can hear an interjection to my left from someone talking about the Emu Swamp Dam. I do not think I have heard a member of the Labor Party talk about the Emu Swamp Dam. I will get to that, but I will not be taking any further interjections.

The roads in my electorate are very poor, and I know that my honourable friend the member for Scenic Rim shares my concern about the Cunningham Highway in particular. Many of the roads have very large undulations in them, which makes it very dangerous and expensive for heavy vehicle operators to run trucks along them. Heavy transport is a very important part of the economy in my electorate of Southern Downs.

When I looked at the glossy budget bauble published by the government I saw that there is nothing, nada, zip. There is absolutely nothing in extra funding to fix the roads in my electorate of Southern Downs. Whilst the regional director has done her job to prepare plans for maintenance and repairs to the roads, this government has not funded them to do anything about it. That does not surprise me because, as I said before in this House, in the eyes of the Labor Party the bush starts at Bald Hills.

We still do not have any tolling information on the second range crossing at Toowoomba. This is a very important matter for the heavy transport operators in my electorate of Southern Downs. I also see remarkably little funding for the Gore Highway, which is going to see considerably increased traffic as a result of the Toowoomba Second Range Crossing. Where is the money? What are we going to do about that? I think this government has completely turned away from the bush and is focused on saving South Brisbane—which, after today's result, I think is probably unlikely.

Electricity is another major issue in my electorate. Labor continues to use electricity as a secret tax. I hear the minister wax lyrical about subsidies and new electricity deals for people, but it does not cut any ice in my electorate of Southern Downs because we have many people in towns like Goondiwindi, Inglewood, Texas, Wallangarra, Toobeah and Talwood who do not have access to competition and are paying exorbitant rates from the New South Wales grid, even though much of the electricity from New South Wales was generated in Queensland because we are a net exporter. This has a massive depressive effect on economic conditions along the border. I have tried at length to get the minister to come to some sort of arrangement to make sure that the people in my electorate of Southern Downs are not disadvantaged, but I have heard nothing but silence. It is another example of the bush being systematically left behind by this Labor government.

When it comes to agriculture, I did not know whether to laugh or cry when I heard the minister for agriculture, Minister Furner, say that the Labor Party is the only party that looks after farmers, declaring himself to be 'Furner, the farmers' friend'. What an egregious distortion of the facts. We are talking about a minister who is a token at the cabinet table. He is a minister in name only. Where does this minister stand when primary producers are demanding certainty on electricity prices? Where does this minister stand when this government imposes disgraceful vegetation management laws on the hardworking primary producers of this state?

Government members interjected.

Mr LISTER: Mr Deputy Speaker, may I ask for your protection? I am struggling to hear myself think over the interjections.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McArdle): I will say to all members that, if you want to talk, take it outside or get on the list.

Mr LISTER: Where does this minister for agriculture stand at the cabinet table when his colleague, the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy—

Dr Lynham: A great bloke.

Mr LISTER: He may be a great bloke—I would agree with that man to man—but as a minister he has failed my electorate. Where is the money for the Emu Swamp Dam? That is a viable project for my electorate. It is a state responsibility to provide money for irrigation. The federal government has contributed \$47 million towards the construction of that dam. The growers themselves are contributing \$23 million towards that dam. All that is required is for this government to produce \$13 million, and the minister knows this. It is only \$13 million, and that will buy the cheapest 700 jobs they have ever bought. I can tell you that they are buying some very expensive jobs with the pork-barrelling they are doing around the areas where they suffered badly at the hands of the coalition at the federal election.

Emu Swamp Dam is a totemic issue. It is an example of how this government has absolutely no interest in the bush. They are prepared to ignore a major economic project which is going to safeguard the production, livelihoods and economy of the Granite Belt part of my electorate. It is the lowest hanging fruit that you can possibly get for \$12 million, but we have seen nothing. There is nothing in the budget. We can tell it is another example of this government, run by Jackie Trad for the convenience of the radical left—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member, please refer to members by their correct titles.

Mr LISTER: I will tell you one thing: it will not be forgotten. The arena is wider than just the Southern Downs. This state expects the government to invest in infrastructure. This government or any government worthy of its name ought to be able to spend money on a vital irrigation project like Emu Swamp Dam, but we saw absolutely nothing in the budget. When we look at the priorities of this government, why would that surprise anybody?

Look at the \$111 million takeover of the private prisons: \$111 million to appease the union movement; \$111 million for no other reason than to make the union bosses, the paymasters and puppeteers of the Labor Party, happy. What could we have bought with \$111 million? We would not need to blame the federal government for our economic woes. When they look at the way this government spends its money, I am not surprised they are appalled. They are not setting a good example.

Before my speech is over I thought I might refer to a few comments from an excellent journalist, Mr Steven Wardill. I often sit here in my seat and look up to see him reclining on his stool in the media gallery, gazing at the ceiling. I think his observations show that ceiling gazers can be very astute watchers of politics. He says—

But what happens when this merry-go-round stops, when the windfalls are no longer delivered and when the price of excess must be paid?

Well Queenslanders are about to find out.

More than \$1.8 billion in new taxes over the next four years were unveiled yesterday by Treasurer Jackie Trad which will hit big business, the property sector and gas producers.

For an economy struggling with stubborn unemployment and falling house prices, the payroll and land tax imposts in particular could not have come at a worse time.

On top of these will be \$1.7 billion that the Government will rake in from its new waste levy over the same period, which will, in one way or another, hit everyone.

That waste levy is a disgrace: \$1.3 billion across the whole state to fix the odious waste problem caused by those Labor mates in the old Ipswich City Council, and only 10 per cent of the take is going to go back to environmental initiatives. It is all being swallowed up by that massive bloated bureaucracy and all of the wasteful spending this government specialises in.

This government has produced a very poor budget. Queensland will not forget the budget that this government has handed down, and I urge everybody in this House to oppose it.