




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL (NO. 2); APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 2)

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (4.28 pm): I rise to make a small contribution on this Appropriation Bill. Even though the Treasurer said that the next budget will be brought down in early April, not June, we are now looking to deposit urgent funds into the till again before the budget comes down. This has not come as loose change either. This is nearly \$1.4 billion extra to get the government through. Queenslanders must be feeling a sense of horror. We are driving back into the black hole of debt with no change of course apparent. People now know what happens to them when they have unforeseen expenditures on this scale. They know because Queensland has to wear the shameful title of the bankruptcy capital of Australia. Between October 2018 and October 2019 there were almost 4,500 bankruptcies in Queensland. That was nearly one-third of the bankruptcies in the entire country.

People know that someone has to repay the debt—if not them then their children. We are heading for \$90 billion in debt over the forward estimates. Do we see a government planning on debt reduction? All we see is a government bent on continuing its high-spending, high-taxing ways, all the while blaming other governments, such as the federal government, or natural disasters for the world of pain it is accumulating for the state we love.

On 20 November 2019 the *Australian* pointed out in its editorial that the Queensland Public Service's bill is now bigger than the federal government's, and not by some minor amount. The Queensland Public Service's wage bill now exceeds Canberra's by some \$6.3 billion. What do Labor announce? They have hired consultants from plush, private firms to advise them on what to do about the problem—a completely self-inflicted problem.

In the meantime, they are going to pay 200,000 public servants a \$1,250 signing bonus to push through the new enterprise bargaining agreement. In September 2019 the *Courier-Mail* published its own calculations based on the number of public servants. They came up with a figure of \$340 million. It is an infuriating figure for what is a piece of pointless nonsense. The public servants would have signed the agreement anyway.

Public servants work hard and are good people, but they are also well paid. They are not a pensioner struggling to pay her electricity bill. They are not a courier van driver paying their van registration month by month because it is the only way they can afford it. Over the life of the Labor government more than \$4.1 billion has been appropriated to cover unforeseen expenditures. On average, that is nearly eight times higher than unforeseen expenditures under the previous LNP government. For 2018-19, three departments accounted for nearly 90 per cent of unforeseen expenditure. One of those was the Department of Transport and Main Roads.

I acknowledge the member for Warrego's contribution where she outlined QTRIP funding for regional, rural and remote roads. The roads in our electorates are now becoming unsafe. Those roads are the lifeblood for the economic viability of this state. They are used to cart organic cattle out of the Channel Country. They are used to cart grain and produce to the ports in eastern Queensland. We see that the Labor government is not interested in funding upgrades. There is a backlog of road maintenance in regional Queensland to the tune of \$9 billion. It is not fair for the people in western, rural, regional and remote Queensland.

I know that the member for Burdekin, who sits beside me, has the same problems in his electorate. One only has to drive the road from Charters Towers down to Clermont or the Peak Downs Highway—the highway to hell as some people call it—from Clermont to Moranbah to understand how unsafe our roads are.

The people of Gregory will be gobsmacked to hear that our local governments are struggling to gain state government funding which is doled out in increasingly competitive grants. In Gregory, people are driving daily on roads that are suffering from the \$9 billion deficit in road maintenance. Believe me, it is noticeable, particularly when there is a change in the weather and the roads are under stress.

I have heard people in Gregory voice their fears that money is being sucked out of Queensland's rural and remote schools. Meanwhile families with special needs children in rural and remote areas are seeing them lose access to special needs education under the guise of inclusive education. Our teaching work force—our public servants—in rural and remote Queensland are living in substandard housing. Too many positions are held in an acting capacity. This is causing confusion and stopping good people from staying out there because they do not have the role to themselves as it is an acting position. All the while, Queensland's NAPLAN scores continue to tumble.

While the health minister busies himself with changing hospital names, our hospital and health services are virtually running on deficits. Waiting lists have exploded for public patients while the media reports that Queensland Treasury, no less, has set Queensland Health a revenue-raising target of \$1.5 billion in so-called user charges and fees. Suddenly, Queensland Health is not a free health service, but a nice little earner if we look at that.

How will that work? Sick Queenslanders who are fortunate enough to have private health insurance will be able to jump the queue for surgery in our public hospitals and their insurer will pay Queensland Health for their treatment. Even before the story came out we saw the Mater close in Gladstone. Who is going to bear the cost? Poorer people who must rely on our busy public hospitals and regional Queenslanders who also must rely on public hospitals as their only treatment option will bear the cost. If our private hospitals close as a result, then it will be every Queenslanders who must rely on public hospitals.

As for the unforeseen expenditure due to natural disasters, this should not have been unforeseen to any true Queenslanders. This year's fire season was not a surprise because last year's fire season was just as challenging. When we have a fire season that brings Queensland's first ever catastrophic fire rating and the next fire season looks to be more of the same, we should not slash the rural fire budget by \$13 million.

In his report, Auditor-General Brendan Worrall gave the dire warning—

Unless the Queensland government can increase its revenue or constrain the recent growth in its expenses, it risks not being able to meet the costs of its activities from the revenue it earns going forward.

For anyone in cabinet or anyone in Treasury, those words from the Auditor-General should be ringing alarm bells. It should be ringing alarm bells for those members opposite because they are in charge of the finances of the Queensland state government. The *Australian* labelled the report into state finances as a grim assessment of the state's finances. This proves that Labor cannot handle the economy and that they are sending this state into more debt which someone has to pay off. It might not be us, but it might be our children or our grandchildren. We cannot leave the state's finances this way.