




Speech By
Brent Mickelberg

MEMBER FOR BUDERIM

Record of Proceedings, 18 June 2021

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (3.07 pm): With the indulgence of the House, I too would like to place on the record my condolences after the passing of Duncan Pegg. As many have already said, Duncan was a passionate and hardworking local member who loved the Stretton community. Duncan was a passionate and genuine advocate for the multicultural communities which are such a significant part of Stretton. I know that Duncan was more than a colleague to many in the parliament; he was a mate. I hope that Duncan's mates, his family and his friends find comfort during this difficult time in the knowledge that Duncan's life of service to his community was a life well lived.

This is the latest in a long line of what those opposite love to describe as another 'good Labor budget'—another Labor budget of debt and deficit.

Mr Saunders: It's a great budget.

Mr MICKELBERG: I take that interjection: it is a great budget of debt and deficit—another Labor budget that is light on detail and heavy on spin, another Labor budget that fails Queenslanders waiting for surgery, another Labor budget that fails residents across the south-east who sit in traffic day after day, another Labor budget that ignores the cries for help from Townsville residents under siege by young criminals, another Labor budget that fails to plan and fails to act on the multitude of issues that make life harder for Queenslanders every single day. Queenslanders deserve better.

This is a budget that relies on what can most kindly be described as creative accounting or what might be more accurately described as deception. The Treasurer has sought to hoodwink Queenslanders into thinking he is doing something about addressing Labor's escalating debt situation. Perhaps the Treasurer's motivation was to ensure that ratings agencies do not hit Queensland with a ratings downgrade, which would decimate his chances of being next in the line of succession for the Labor leadership.

It says much about Labor that rather than fixing the problem it has sought to use trickery and deception to hide the problem. Just three weeks ago the land titles office was worth \$4.2 billion. It was a lofty valuation when one considers the fact that in 2019 the land titles office generated around \$300 million in revenue, so it beggars belief that Labor has, three weeks later, jacked up the valuation of the titles office to around \$7.8 billion. At that valuation, if the land titles office was a listed entity, it would be the 69th largest listed company on the Australian Stock Exchange—larger than well-known companies like Channel 7, Ampol, Aurizon, Harvey Norman, Bank of Queensland, AGL, JB Hi-Fi and Channel 9, just to name a few. It simply does not stack up.

To make matters worse, on the basis of this rubbery valuation, the Treasurer has then ripped \$1.5 billion from defined benefit superannuation assets to pay back the government \$1.8 billion, so it begs the question where the cash came from to fund this \$1.8 billion that is to be retained by the government from this transaction. I suspect the answer is in the fact that the government does intend

to rip the liquid assets out of the Future Fund which would mean the government is going to again raid funds set aside to meet the superannuation obligations of public servants. It is nothing more than the latest Labor money-go-round.

We have heard the Treasurer come in here and scream and shout about how we are all wrong. He has thrown around lots of thinly veiled threats about highly paid consultants, but if the Treasurer really wants to show that we on this side of the House are wrong there is a simple course of action that he can take, and that course of action is to table the valuation. That will detail how his tenuous valuation was arrived at for the lands title office. It is time for the Treasurer to put up or shut up.

The government has made much of its investment in this budget in training and support—an investment that has been underwritten by the Morrison LNP government through its \$2 billion JobTrainer investment which has supported every single state. Of the \$460 million that the Minister for Training and Skills Development and her colleagues have been crowing about, \$384.8 million is being funded by the LNP federal government. That equates to more than 83 per cent of the funding coming from the federal government, with less than 17 per cent coming from the state government. It is clear who is doing the heavy lifting when it comes to investment in training and skills in Queensland, and it is most certainly not the Labor state government.

Ms Boyd: Who is it?

Mr MICKELBERG: Who is it? I hear the interjection from the member for Pine Rivers. It is the federal government—more than 83 per cent of funding for this Labor state budget.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bush): Comments will come through the chair.

Mr MICKELBERG: I will be watching intently the government's expansion of the Back to Work program. I note the minister's comment that 'wherever you are in Queensland you deserve the chance to get a good job'. I agree. Unfortunately, as I raised in estimates in December, what we have seen with the Back to Work program is cherry-picking by the government in relation to which regions get support and which regions miss out. I look forward to programs like Back to Work being available to all regions of Queensland.

Unfortunately this budget fails to provide any measures to support small businesses that are identified as COVID exposure sites despite the consistent calls from businesses that have had their life turned upside down when identified as a potential COVID exposure site. Many small businesses, through no fault of their own, have been left to carry the can when they have shut down as a consequence of public health directives. I note that many of those businesses are located in seats held by Labor members of this House, yet their silence on this issue is deafening, particularly the member for Pine Rivers, where many of the most recent businesses impacted by the Brisbane lockdown were sited.

Business owners like Maree from the Gin Gin Bakery feel abandoned by this state government and it is time that the government listens to their cries for help. The government could start by providing better information and specific grants to help small businesses meet the costs of cleaning, increased staff costs and to make up for lost revenue when businesses are identified by Queensland Health as COVID exposure venues. It is disappointing that the government continues to ignore the cries for help from these small businesses like the Gin Gin Bakery. I do not believe it is unreasonable to ask that funding for such a grant be established, noting that it will only be required whenever cases arise in the community. The assumptions that underpin this budget assume that there will be no significant COVID outbreaks, so if the government has confidence in these assumptions then it should have no hesitation in setting aside a relatively small sum of money to support businesses when they need it most.

Turning now to my open data responsibilities, in this budget we can see just how little importance the government places on the digital economy and on the principle of transparency. In this budget we see no mention of how the government is going to enable business innovation and entrepreneurship through the release of government data. We see no initiatives to improve public confidence in the delivery of government services with data that is more timely and easier to digest. Along with the LNP leader, David Crisafulli, I have been calling on the government to follow the lead of other states and implement real-time reporting of hospital emergency data. Queenslanders want to know that when they go to a hospital they will get treatment when they need it.

If we are to look at Townsville as an example, it is pretty clear that the Labor government is losing control of Townsville's health system just like it has lost control of crime in Townsville. Townsville has the worst record of treating elective surgery patients on time. More than one out of every three patients does not receive surgery in the clinically recommended time frame. That is more than 4,000 North Queensland locals who are suffering with their condition longer than a doctor has recommended. It is not much better in the emergency department in Townsville, where 18.1 per cent of patients were not

seen in the clinically recommended time frame. That is an increase of more than eight per cent since February last year, and we only know this information because the government was dragged kicking and screaming to release hospital performance data by the shadow minister for health and I.

Townsville's health crisis is replicated across the state and the initiative that was announced today by the Minister for Health will do nothing to resolve the crisis or improve public confidence. Queenslanders deserve better than to be kept in the dark about the performance of their local hospitals. We know that a culture of secrecy pervades the government from the top down, but hospital data is not being shared and it should be. I call on the state government again to get serious about transparency and to commit to publishing real-time hospital performance data for the benefit of every Queenslander.

Turning now to my local electorate, I am pleased to see some funding committed for the construction of a new Palmview state high school which the Palmview community and I have been fighting to get built for years. A new high school is desperately needed to cater for the increased student numbers which are the consequence of thousands of new residents moving to the Sunshine Coast each year. What is disappointing is that the construction of a new high school has been delayed and will only open in January 2023. The Harmony development in Palmview is the fastest selling development in Australia. Just last week people were camped out trying to buy blocks in Harmony. In 2017 when I was elected to this place there were no residents in Palmview at all and now 5,000 residents call Palmview home, so the need for a new high school has been self-evident for some time.

All that said, where we are now is that the high school will open in January 2023, so I ask the Minister for Education to work with me to find a solution to support the small cohort of year 6 students who are enrolled at Palmview State Primary School. These students will need to go to their third school in three years if they are to attend the new Palmview state high school in 2023. The fact that planning for a new high school has been inadequate does not mean that the impact should fall on students who have already dealt with considerable disruption moving to a new school this year, so I again call on the Minister for Education to work with me and members of the Palmview Learning Community, including parents, teachers and school leadership, to find a way to mitigate the considerable impact which these year 6 students, who are now thriving at Palmview State Primary School, will experience.

I am pleased to see funding allocated in the budget for construction of new school halls at Buderim Mountain State School and at Chancellor State College Secondary Campus. I have been working with both the Buderim Mountain and Chancellor school communities since I was elected to deliver school halls for both.

I spoke in my last budget debate speech about how disappointing it was to see schools like Caloundra State High School that has 560 students have extensions to their existing hall funded ahead of Chancellor State College and Buderim Mountain State School, both of which do not have a school hall and have a combined student population of around 3½ thousand students. One might ask what the reason was, apart from the fact that Caloundra was a marginal seat that the Labor Party was seeking to gain. Nonetheless, the government's funding allocation for the construction of new school halls will be important additions to my community which will result in better access to opportunities and learning outcomes for students.

Turning now to the Mooloolah River interchange, where we see a \$4 million commitment from the government to upgrade this important stretch of road in the centre of the Sunshine Coast which is choking business and choking our community, the government has taken three years to finalise a business case—which we still have not seen, I might add. I have very little faith that the government is genuinely committed to upgrading the Mooloolah River interchange despite the fact that the federal government has stumped up half the cost to upgrade what is purely and solely a responsibility of the state government, it being a state road.

Mr Bailey: That was a good deal, wasn't it?

Mr MICKELBERG: I take the interjection from the Minister for Transport and Main Roads. The federal government has offered the state a good deal and they would be well served to take that good deal and start building the road. On the plus side, I notice there is \$15 million allocated in the budget for upgrades to the Sugar Road-Mooloolaba Road intersection, which is known as the Buderim-Mooloolaba interchange. I acknowledge the Minister for Transport and Main Roads who is currently in the House and place on the record my thanks to him for coming out to that site with me and inspecting the problem on the ground. I welcome the action to get work started and I note that there is a considerable allocation—I think it is a tad over \$3 million this year—to get work started.

This is a budget that fails Queenslanders. This is a budget that puts the interests of Queenslanders second to the interests of the Labor Party. The government has chosen to use a policy that seeks to obscure the true state of the Queensland economy and the expenditure of the Queensland government. Queenslanders deserve better.