




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing) (12.32 pm): It is interesting to listen to the speeches in response to the budget. We have just heard from the shadow Treasurer, who presumably wants to be Treasurer of this state. All week, all we have seen from the LNP is gimmicks, cliches and one-liners and nothing—and I mean nothing—of substance.

We are in the middle of a world health pandemic. Some areas of New South Wales have just been declared hotspots because there is an outbreak, and Victoria is just coming out of lockdown. We are not out of the woods yet. Our economic recovery sees Queensland leading the nation for jobs and growth, yet there is nothing from those opposite but whingeing.

The budget strengthens the core pillars of the Palaszczuk Labor government: health care, education, infrastructure, renewables and jobs, jobs, jobs. We have just seen the labour force statistics for Queensland—and what a beautiful set of figures they are. I think they are worth repeating. We can have all the social justice funds in the world, but the best fund is one that delivers jobs. Where are we now? Unemployment is at 5.4 per cent. We are leading the nation on every economic indicator. That is the reality. Those opposite can talk about anything they want, but the latest figures do not back up what they are saying. Our participation rate is going up, yet our unemployment rate is going down. That is an incredible feat in the middle of a world health pandemic.

Opposition members interjected.

Ms GRACE: We hear the deniers opposite. As soon as you mention COVID, as soon as you mention the world health pandemic, those opposite deny. They are living under a rock. They say it is a conspiracy and it is not happening. As we know, those opposite can get nothing right. The federal government cannot even get it right when it comes to vaccinating Australians. They cannot get it right in terms of international borders. They make a Biloela family suffer. At the same time, they cannot do anything when it comes to quarantine in this state. They washed their hands of it. If it were not for the states, we would be in dire straits in this country. Nobody can dispute that.

This government has created 337,400 jobs since it came to office. We have recouped all of the jobs lost due to the pandemic. In fact, we are ahead by 84,000. That is an extraordinary feat. Employers are still calling for more jobs, and our excellent Minister for Small Business is working to ensure we have the skills and training in place to meet those demands.

When it comes to infrastructure, I wish those opposite could just read budget papers. First they said there are cuts in infrastructure spending. Then they said there are reductions in infrastructure spending. Then they talked about shrinkage in infrastructure spending. We on this side of the House know that the people of Queensland had a choice in October. They chose a government that would keep Queenslanders safe. They endorsed our recovery plan, our jobs plan and our plan to provide

health services to support them through a world health pandemic. They elected Labor members in spades. Here we are on this side of the House for four more years. Why would people not do that? Those opposite have not one new idea and not one solution and they do nothing but whinge.

I said to my staff, 'When the opposition leader makes his budget reply speech, can you let me know if he says anything about the education budget that I can refer to?' My staff waited and waited but, unfortunately, they heard not one alternative education policy. It did not take them long to realise that they had no plans for education in the state. There was not one mention of one of the fundamental, core skills we want to give young people in this state. So far in this budget week—I know there is still a short question time to come tomorrow—I have not been asked one question about education, one of the most important pillars of this year's budget.

It is an absolute disgrace when you consider that those opposite talk about health, yet there was nothing in the opposition leader's reply speech about how they hope to fix the malaise they keep talking about. Perhaps those opposite should spend less time whingeing, spinning wheels and opening stupid cupboards and more time developing policy alternatives.

I agree with some of the interjections that were made when the shadow Treasurer talked about principles. What are their principles when it comes to cutting, sacking and selling? There was a bit of a hint: only if they are not savage. They must not reach the 'savage' point on the indicator, whatever that means.

The Deputy Premier went through a number of alternatives about what savage means, but we know one thing: the Queensland people are not going to give those opposite any chance to savage them again, yet that reply speech was exactly that. The only idea the LNP has is loans to social enterprises, but unfortunately we beat those opposite to it in the last budget. We actually have a Social Enterprise Jobs Fund. Oops! They did not realise we have one already.

When it comes to giving those in the social sector jobs, those opposite were the ones who cut Skilling Queenslanders for Work. If there is one group that benefits from Skilling Queenslanders for Work, it is those in the social enterprise area and we have now locked in \$320 million over four years with permanent funding for a program that delivers in spades for those unemployed people to get the skills they need to get jobs. I have had texts from people in the social sector saying, 'Thank you so much for locking in that funding.' The job rate for those participants is at 90 per cent—that is, 90 per cent of the participants in Skilling Queenslanders for Work got jobs in that particular social enterprise. So the LNP has this new idea that we announced in the last budget!

The LNP has a shocking record when it comes to the communities sector. Can members imagine for one second that sector trusting those opposite? They axed \$368 million in community grants to support Queenslanders in need of assistance. That is what they did when they were in government and the communities sector will not forget it. But worst of all, they gagged community groups from speaking up on behalf of the people that they represent. In a free world there is nothing more shocking than gagging a whole sector from speaking up and threatening their livelihoods. That sector was gagged because if it spoke up those opposite would take away its funding, and those opposite now expect this sector to trust them with their one idea that came out of the reply speech. It is a joke, they are a joke and that is why they are over there. What strings will be attached to these loans? I will tell members: 'You can't say anything. Never complain. We'll gag you again. We'll give you the money, but don't you dare come out and represent your constituents because we'll gag you. We're going to use this money.' Members can bet their bottom dollar that that is exactly what those opposite will do. Will these social enterprises, as I said, just have to shut up and put up while the LNP cuts programs like Skilling Queenslanders for Work again? That is what those opposite are looking forward to with their idea—an idea that we announced in the last budget! That is a great idea and the only one that came out.

When it comes to the education budget, it is an honour to be the Minister for Education in this state, and the Leader of the Opposition was right: I do listen to everyone in this House when it comes to their needs and we do not play politics with it. When it comes to meeting growth and the schooling requirements of our students, I put that first before any other consideration. I was very grateful that the Leader of the Opposition acknowledged that and that infrastructure is being spread and we are meeting those requirements where the demands are. There is no doubt about that. It is an honour to work with everyone in this House to deliver that, because education is a core in this state. I look forward to working with everyone to deliver the infrastructure that we need, the teachers that we need, the teacher aides and the cleaners, who have done an outstanding job during COVID, to implement our record \$15.3 billion budget.

We want to deliver the 10 schools in those fast growing areas. As I have mentioned all week, we want to deliver the new classrooms that we need in various areas of the state. No-one is missing out. There is an incredible amount of money going into the regions and everywhere throughout the state. I look forward

to delivering the local jobs and all of those local facilities and amenities. There is maintenance renewal. There will be an expansion in outside school hours care at around 50 school sites because we know that balancing school and vacation care is important. We are working with schools in Ipswich, Victoria Point State School in Redlands, Ormiston State School in Oodgeroo and others right around the state. With regard to halls, I cannot believe that I am still building halls, but I am and there is money there for halls right across the state.

Our air-conditioning program is fully funded. It is incredible and on track in terms of air conditioning every classroom, every staff room and every library. We are doing an incredible job in rolling that out. New South Wales is now coming to us and asking, 'Please tell us how you're doing it because we can't deliver it. What are you doing? How are you doing it?' New South Wales is so far behind that it is not funny and it is now coming here asking us what we are doing and how we are doing it. We have our ACES program. We have local schools and local jobs. We have school employment. We have our election commitments that we are rolling out. It is an honour to be part of delivering this budget—an education budget and a health budget in a world health pandemic.

Industrial relations is being funded for our signature new laws. When it comes to labour hire licensing, we have one of the most successful laws in the nation. When it comes to wage theft laws, we have extra inspectors to ensure that workers across the nation are not exploited. Racing can look forward to an additional at least \$41.3 million from our 35 per cent point-of-consumption tax. The member for Mermaid Beach would be very happy in relation to that. He loves his racing and I actually like going to the races with him as well.

In the electorate of McConnel the highlights are \$15 million for Brisbane Central classrooms in a growth area, Fortitude Valley at second stage and \$11 million for New Farm State School out of \$20.6 million that will continue to build the classrooms. There is \$15 million allocated for the Ballymore redevelopment. That is going to be fantastic and will see Ballymore reshaped into a national Rugby training centre which will be the new headquarters for the Wallaroos and the Queensland Reds men's and women's squads. Newstead House, one of the oldest surviving European homes in Brisbane, is gearing up for a nearly \$4 million major restoration and refurbishment to ensure that the future of this beautiful and iconic landmark is maintained.

I could go on, but one of the most significant things that I am very happy about is the \$7 million in support for the live music industry. There is no doubt that it has been hard hit by COVID and I want to roll that out as we have rolled out funds already for the live music industry worth \$1.3 million. I have visited some live music spots. Last week I was at the Tivoli and at the Woolly Mammoth not too long ago and The Triffid. We want to make sure that they survive COVID because it and its impacts are real and this government recognises that and is doing something about it. It is an honour to be involved in this budget, and I endorse it. I congratulate the Treasurer and my colleagues. Under the Premier's leadership, we kept this state safe. We can now implement our economic plan and create the jobs that Queenslanders deserve.