




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

Record of Proceedings, 18 June 2021

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (2.37 pm): Before I begin my contribution, I would like to follow in the footsteps of many of the members of this House in acknowledging Duncan Pegg and expressing my condolences to his family and friends. He was a very, very clever man. We all liked him. He was a particularly fierce fighter for his views and his electorate. I remember that in the last term, when I sat where the member for Mount Ommaney now sits, he was just across the aisle from me. I can see a knowing smile from the member for Maryborough. He used to get in my ear. He used to have a nuanced way of interjecting and whispering that put me off what I was saying. It was infuriating. All I could do was bellow at him, but it never seemed to work. I really liked Duncan. I was terribly sad to hear of his passing. I was incredibly proud to have known him, particularly in the way that he faced his impending death from cancer. I think he was a great Queenslander and he will be sorely missed by many.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

Mr LISTER: I rise to make my contribution on the budget bills on behalf of the people of Southern Downs. The electorate of Southern Downs is a great producer of minerals, food and fibre. It is comprised of a number of communities that are particularly based around agriculture. We make a great contribution to this state, so whenever I look at the budget I am always looking for what is going to be there for us. I am disappointed that in this budget there has not been what I feel we deserve in Southern Downs.

Whilst I am critical of the re-announcement of funding and projects which have already been put forward—one of my local papers, the *Daily Journal*, described it as an Aladdin's lamp where the lamps are repolished and put back on the shelf, which is true to some extent; I am talking here about funding for the police station in Warwick, Warwick State High School's new building, Emu Swamp Dam, Coolmunda Dam and the water projects which were announced recently by the minister for water, the member for Gladstone—I would like to say that I do appreciate those things.

I would like to thank the government for those announcements for Warwick, particularly a water treatment plant to enable the people of Allora and Warwick, which share a common pipeline, to have water of a drinking standard. There are extra bores for those towns which will mean the towns will rely less on Leslie Dam and there will also be water security for John Dee meatworks, which employs 600 people. That water security is very important. There is also funding for a really detailed business case into the possibility of a pipeline connecting Warwick and Toowoomba. That will give the Southern Downs Regional Council and Mayor Vic Pennisi the opportunity to work out what is in the ratepayers' interests. I thank the government for those things.

Overall, I feel we have not got what we deserve. I reflect on the debt situation in the state. If we are going to be \$120-odd billion in debt—and that is going to take a long time to repay, generations in fact, and it will go to our kids and grandkids—I want to see some of that spent on the Southern Downs.

I am particularly thinking about something which affects everyone, and that is the highways—the Gore Highway, the Cunningham Highway and the New England Highway. In some places they are in pretty bad shape. I know that the department do their best to run a rolling program of maintenance to fix problems where roads are collapsing and there are potholes, undulations and so forth. There needs to be big money spent, particularly considering that the Gore Highway is now increasingly important for interstate trucks which are using the second range crossing. There needs to be more than just a patch job or a couple of million dollars spent here and there; it needs to be rebuilt, particularly around the Wyaga crossings. I will continue to argue with the government that that should be a priority.

Some work is being done on the Cunningham Highway between Yelarbon and Goondiwindi, which is great to see. I will be keen to see whether those works are of a standard which will prevent future collapses of the road. Similar to the Wyaga Creek crossings of the Gore Highway, water flows underneath the road, it is black soil and it ends up with these undulations which are pressed in progressively by the trucks that are going across them.

I have mentioned the New England Highway in passing to the minister and I have written to him and been in touch with the regional office about this. Work has been going on between Stanthorpe and Ballandean, and the roadworks there appear to be functionally complete. The contractor has been telling locals that they are upping sticks as soon as they put white lines and cats' eyes on the road and that has alarmed the local residents. The people of the southern Granite Belt have made it abundantly clear to me that they are very concerned about this. I acknowledge that a departmental officer will be going to meet with the chairman of the chamber of commerce on the Granite Belt, Graham Parker, so that the concerns of the businesses and locals who use those roads can be shared. I am hoping that what we see now will not be the finished product for the New England Highway.

In education, one of the things I have gleaned from my visits to the 40-odd schools in Southern Downs—most of which are state schools—is that there is increasingly a need for younger students to have access to a community nurse in their schools for referrals and looking after their medical welfare. Many of the teachers have said to me that they are teaching professionals, not health professionals, and that they feel, understandably, uncomfortable delving into some of the matters that the young people are facing.

One thing is for sure: a growing number of increasingly younger children are coming to school with mental health issues. Some are traumatised, some are neglected, and that could be for a variety of reasons. We all agree that early intervention is important, so I would like to see the state government invest money in community nurses. I do not just mean in high schools for a day or two a week; they should also be in primary schools. I spoke to the principal of one of the prep to year 10 schools in my electorate who said that they were increasingly seeing children in years 4 to 6 or younger who need that attention. I have written to the regional director about this, and I will be happy to take it up with the minister in due course if necessary.

There has been a lot of talk about health, and there is a very sad situation with health in this state. There are so many people on waiting lists and there is so much ambulance ramping happening. I have been looking at what the statistics are saying: that an alarming percentage of patients are being ramped, up to 40 per cent; that 23 per cent of patients are not being seen within the clinically recommended time; and that the waiting list is at almost 55,000. That is about double what it was when the LNP left government in 2015. I do take the point that we are in a different time with different circumstances, but the government must react to this. I am not satisfied that record spending, record spending and record spending is the answer; we need record output. We need to be judging the system by what it produces, and we require a record output—

Mr Krause: And record outcomes.

Mr LISTER: And we require record outcomes; I take that interjection from the member for Scenic Rim. That is what we should be focusing on. Throwing money at the problem alone is not the answer, because the Health budgets will become unsustainable. We need to be smarter about how we deliver health services. I note that my predecessor as member for Southern Downs, the Hon. Lawrence Springborg, was very successful in cutting waiting lists and getting rid of ramping. He did that by simply taking a farmer's approach—by representing the taxpayer, by representing the patient, by saying, 'This is what we require of Health. The purpose of Health is to make people well,' and not all of the other considerations which seem to infiltrate the way the Labor government administers health.

Dr Rowan: What about maternity services?

Mr LISTER: I take that interjection from my honourable friend the member for Moggill. He is a doctor, although I do not know if he delivers many babies. The good folk in communities west of the Great Dividing Range are entitled to know that they can have their babies close to home wherever

possible. The withdrawal of maternity services from places like Chinchilla is a bit of a slap in the face, which indicates that Labor does not prioritise looking after people regardless of where they come from, as the Premier always says.

I want to add a personal dimension to this issue of ramping. My wife, Belinda, broke her leg very badly at work some years ago. Because the Air Force base where we were stationed did not have the facilities for that level of trauma, she was taken from the medical centre at the base in a Queensland ambulance to Ipswich Hospital. That was done on the premise that when you are really sick you go to a proper public hospital because they will have the resources and the capability to look after you. When I got there after my wife had arrived, I saw a car park full of ambulances—from memory, there would have been a dozen at least—and each of them had two paramedics attached to them. When I went inside and was finally reunited with my wife, there was a queue of patients on stretchers waiting to be seen, with two paramedics next to each one. That is what ramping means.

My wife had a very serious leg fracture in two places but she waited for four or five hours before she was seen. The result of that was that she developed fracture blisters and she could not have her leg set and operated on that day. She had to wait for three weeks in hospital before she was ready to have the surgery. She also ended up developing a bone infection. When patients are ramped, it is not an abstract topic on which we throw mud at one another across the floor of the House. It matters to people. It mattered to my wife. My family and my wife went through a great deal of difficulty. The pain and suffering that my wife endured as a result of being ramped at Ipswich Hospital will never be forgotten. I am sure in saying that that I speak for thousands of Queenslanders who have experienced the trauma of being injured or sick and going to hospital and waiting while their paramedics, who are being paid and who have an ambulance sitting idle outside, stand next to them. It has to stop.

If Lawrence Springborg—a farmer with a grade 10 education—can take on the Department of Health and practically eliminate ramping, then this government can do it too. I know that the LNP will grasp the nettle and make Health function for the people who need it. There are no other considerations. The Department of Health is there to make people well, and that should be the only focus of the government in funding health services.

I now wish to talk about police. We always hear about record budgets in these departments. Goondiwindi is in my electorate and it is a fantastic town. Bernard Salt, the esteemed demographer, said that it is the greatest town in Queensland, and who can argue with him? It is a fantastic place with great people.

Mr Molhoek: I think he says that about every town.

Mr LISTER: I assure the member for Southport that it really is true in the case of Goondiwindi.

We have a crime problem in Goondiwindi, which is a blight on an otherwise fabulous town. I see the police devoting enormous amounts of their time and absorbing the budget to simply rearrest offenders who have been let out time and time again, slapped on the wrist by a magistrate, allowed to leave and rejoice on the steps at how they have received no penalty and they are out on bail again only to commit the same crimes night after night: assaults, thefts, vandalism. If you are a tradesman and you have lost your ute because some scallywag has stolen it and put it in the Macintyre River or burnt it, this is a serious matter. This is a question of people's livelihoods. It is a great moral injury to have someone steal your goods or break into your house. In the case of the 5 Star supermarket in Goondiwindi, I was talking to Chris Henry. He and his wife, Gail, run a small supermarket. They had some kids steal a vehicle, back it into the front of the shop and steal some lollies. That caused \$20,000 worth of damage and it was not the first time. We all pay for that in increased insurance premiums and the costs of operating businesses.

To say that we cannot incarcerate or have punitive penalties for those who commit these crimes because it does not do them any good misses the point. It is not right that those people who live by and uphold the law should be told to be patient and tolerate the crime until we fix the problems that have caused it. That is not on. The first duty of the government is to protect those law-abiding citizens who do the right thing from those who do not. I know I speak overwhelmingly for the population of Goondiwindi and other towns in saying that because I just presented a 3,000-signature petition before the House calling for breach of bail laws to be brought back in. If somebody has breached the privilege of being on bail and they are put away, within a few weeks in a town like Goondiwindi there will be no-one left to commit the crime. If anyone opposite wants to pooh-pooh me and say that is not the approach to take, I ask them to come to Goondiwindi and ask the locals who have had their car stolen or their businesses broken into, who have been assaulted or had their houses entered, how they feel about those things.

There is a lot more I would like to say, but time is against me. I thank the House for the opportunity.