




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (3.57 pm): In a week of widespread fogs across Queensland, I bet one of the foggiest places to be was the media budget lock-up on Tuesday, and trapped in the fog were those poor journalists trying to make sense of Labor's budget.

As *InQueensland* reported, this year's budget papers have changed so much it is difficult to compare years, let alone compare Queensland to other states. You cannot see what is new money and what are recycled announcements. You cannot see where the money previously allocated has been fully expended. Despite being designed to confuse, the Treasurer's budget certainly finished with a theatrical flourish—a surprise surplus just in time for the next election.

Of course, the fog lifts and the Treasurer's fog clears. Journalists have started to see an awful lot of ducks that have to line up for that slim surplus to happen. For instance, in a state famous for its extreme weather events, we need to have three consecutive years of good, calm weather. I do not think any grazier or farmer would take that bet.

In addition, we cannot have any serious COVID-19 outbreaks, lockdowns or border closures. No-one controls this as long as there is a single country that has not achieved full vaccination. That is a long way off. For the foreseeable future, COVID-19 will continue to circulate around the globe, mutating from time to time. We will be living with the coronavirus for some years yet.

The surplus miracle we will need is for the Labor government to restrain its spending in a way that does not affect growth but achieves the Treasurer's targets. Sadly for us, the *Courier-Mail* reports this morning that the only year the Palaszczuk government has achieved this was last year when everyone was periodically locked down or restricted.

The return to surplus is not just a surprise, it is a fairytale. The surplus was not even the most surprising aspect of the budget. That would be the magic beanstalk school of accounting that found the value of the Queensland titles office to be a whopping \$7.8 billion. When I write my report to my constituents this week they will be very surprised because they already know that last sitting week it was only valued at \$4.2 billion. This itself was a surprise because New South Wales has a bigger economy and its Titles Registry was only valued at \$2.86 billion. The new valuation of nearly \$8 billion will really knock their socks off. If we look at the value of the companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange, the humble Queensland titles office now ranks safely in the top 50 biggest companies in Australia.

Using this figure, the Queensland government has now sold the titles office to itself. Not a real dollar was harmed in that transaction because no real money changed hands. Through this accounting magic the Treasurer reduced Queensland's debt figure without actually reducing the amount of debt Queenslanders must repay. It is a hoax, plain and simple. It has been played on Queenslanders by this shameless Labor government.

The budget magic did not stop there. The Treasurer had swiped \$2 billion of the imaginary money and put it into a fund for social housing and another \$2 billion of the imaginary money into a fund for hospital infrastructure. These funds are supposed to be going to deliver all this money but sometime in the never-never. Today, and in the here and now, there is not a single dollar in the budget against either of these funds.

That is hospital buildings taken care of, but what about the money for funding health services—the urgently needed money to fund the actual treatment and care of our sick and injured, our new mums and bubs and our frail elderly. We came into this budget with Queensland Health in crisis across the state, from the hospital boards to the hospital beds. The LNP has brought case after case to question time and the Treasurer described this as bleating. These are real Queenslanders telling him the truth. As the member for Mudgeeraba asked: where else in the modern world are people left on stretchers for hours crying for help?

My constituent in the seat of Gregory, Rob from Dingo, told how he had to drive himself to the Rockhampton Hospital because his GP said he was suffering a heart attack. That is a two-hour drive while having a heart attack. Just think about that for a moment. Having got himself there, Rob parked the car and went into the ED where he was ramped for three hours. Watching the frantic and frazzled staff, he had nothing but praise for them, but he thought to himself, 'This might not end well for me.'

Make no mistake, this health crisis is not just in the south-east corner, it is right across the state. In my neck of the woods, the health minister put an administrator into the North West Hospital and Health Service. They know it is not the hospital and health board's mismanagement, it is that they are chronically underfunded. The Palaszczuk Labor government sets its budgets and the budgets are not sufficient to provide the services expected of them.

The crisis is not just in the emergency rooms. It is in every department—surgery, outpatient treatments like renal dialysis, radiology, mental health and palliative care. Talking about renal dialysis, we still do not have renal dialysis for a town the size of Emerald. Emerald has a population of 15,000 people. If someone needs renal dialysis they have to travel three hours to Rockhampton to receive it. That is simply not good enough. For a region which provides so much in coal royalties and so much in agricultural exports, it is not good enough that we cannot get renal dialysis in a town like Emerald.

The Queensland AMA has said that 1,500 beds are needed to fix what is a \$3 billion problem. Tuesday's budget gave Queensland Health no new money. This morning the *Courier-Mail* reported that the AMAQ is so devastated by this Labor budget that it is convening secret round tables of doctors, nurses and hospital administrators to generate a five-year plan that would rescue Queensland Health. This shows how desperate the situation is. It also shows how disfranchised our medical insiders feel. The Minister for Health, the Treasurer and the Premier should feel mortified by this. These good Queenslanders are having to do their job for them.

Why do the participants want their names and identities kept secret? They fear government retribution. They fear personal payback because their participation could be seen as criticism of the Minister for Health, the Treasurer and the Premier. These are good Queenslanders bravely attempting to save our free public hospital system. They deserve our gratitude and our admiration. They deserve our moral and financial support. No doubt the Premier and the Treasurer believe that these health workers should be grateful for this budget—after all they were intending to impose \$550 million in cuts to health. The Treasurer calls these cuts efficiency and productivity dividends, but they are cuts. Remember, Queensland Health still has to find the efficiency dividends imposed on it in the budget last November. We all know the Treasurer is a great showman. He has tried to quiet this health revolt by saying the budget is a record health budget. The truth is that Queensland's health budget only increased by the extra amount Canberra gave them in this year's federal budget—\$400 million.

I am running short of time, but I briefly want to touch on the complete disregard shown in this budget for the department of agriculture. The operating budget for the department of agriculture has been cut by 10 per cent and there are fewer staff. There is barely a mention of pest and weed management or biosecurity preparation and management.

As members of this House would know, the electorate of Gregory has suffered nearly a decade of drought and is still drought declared today. Queensland is party to an agreement with the federal government to move drought policy from one of reactive assistance to one of active drought preparation and resilience. This budget has no new investment in rural training, education or research to help agriculture rise to the challenge. This budget has completely failed to address the pressing need for Queensland's farmers to have better crop insurance options as a part of dealing with climate change. There is not even any funding for new water infrastructure.

In his speech the Treasurer boasted he had achieved a projected surplus without asset sales. Pull the other one! Just over two weeks ago, he sold the Emerald Agricultural College's beef property, Berrigurra, for \$32.5 million. I assume that money is funding the \$10.9 million over five years to finalise the so-called long-term decisions on the rest of the assets and their sale.

Minister Furner likes to call himself the farmers' friend. Here is my challenge to Minister Furner. On Saturday, 26 June, which is during Ag-Grow, I invite the minister to come to Ag-Grow, walk around with me and see how much friendship he experiences at Ag-Grow. Also on Saturday, 26 June the Emerald Agriculture College's past students are having a 50-year anniversary of the opening of the Emerald Agricultural College. In 1971 they opened the Emerald Agricultural College. I reckon they would love to see Minister Furner at that event. I reckon he would find so many friends! They would absolutely enjoy his company. I can tell members what they will be asking him. They will be asking, 'Why did you close down what is essential agricultural skill training in Queensland? Why did you close down the Longreach Pastoral College which had been going for well over 52 years?' Why did the minister close that down? Why did he close down the Emerald Agricultural College? Lock the gates.

Mr Mickelberg interjected.

Mr MILLAR: They do not care. He is not the farmers' friend. I feel that the minister could be misleading this parliament. There was an agriculture minister who was called the farmers' friend and that was Henry Palaszczuk, but he earned that title from the agriculture industry. He understood agriculture. He could not always deliver for agriculture, but he gave his best to agriculture. He was well respected around Queensland. I can tell members that Mark Furner is not the farmers' friend in Queensland. We have seen agriculture close down. We have seen the department of agriculture cut by 10 per cent in this budget. We have seen fewer staff for the department of agriculture. He is not the farmers' friend.

While the Minister for Resources is in the chamber, I would like to note that this budget provides not one extra dollar for the Mines Inspectorate despite the scathing findings regarding the explosion at the Grosvenor mine in Central Queensland. I ask the minister to look at that.

I thank the Minister for Resources for his support, along with the resources industry, for the commitment for a new hospital for Blackwater. As many members would know, Blackwater is the beating heart of the coal industry right throughout Queensland. It was formed back in 1960 by a company called Utah. The town has grown significantly over that time. The hospital in Blackwater was built when Utah owned the town and were an important part of the town. Blackwater has a population of 6,000 people, but it actually services a population of around 12,000 people through fly-in fly-out and drive-in drive-out.

A new hospital has been a long time coming. I have been working with the Chair of the Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service, Paul Bell, along with the CEO, and the resources industry through the Queensland Resources Council with Ian Macfarlane and Kirby Anderson. We have managed to collectively come together to get this hospital for Blackwater. I thank the people of Blackwater for getting behind this new hospital for Blackwater. I think it is very important.

When it comes to education, one of the disappointing things in this budget was something that was raised at the Isolated Children's Parents' Association conference in Cunnamulla, and it is something for which I have been campaigning for a long time. It is the accommodation facilities at the Longreach School of Distance Education and the Capricornia School of Distance Education in Emerald. That accommodation was built and funded by the P&Cs, by the graziers and farmers, in Central Queensland to accommodate children coming to those schools of distance education four times a year for what we call mini schools. That accommodation has been shut down by this government. That is disgraceful because these children need to get together. They need to have that interaction throughout the year with other children, parents and teachers that they hear through their computer. Also, once a year they have their annual play. These children are isolated. They live 500 or 600 kilometres away from each other. They need to come together. The situation of the accommodation facilities needs to be corrected.

The Minister for Education talked this morning about the magnificent amount of money they are putting into schools and classrooms. How about putting some of that money into the accommodation facilities that the government has shut down and bring them up to standard so children as young as five can come into Longreach and Emerald to participate? What you are asking them to do now is find accommodation for five days in Emerald and Longreach when we know it is high season. Those parents have to spend over \$1,500 a week just to come in and participate in their mini schools. This is incredibly important.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the sad passing of Duncan Pegg. Duncan was a great bloke and I enjoyed his company. Duncan and I did not agree on everything but that did not get in the way of our friendship and respect for each other—and our love for cricket. That is one

thing Duncan and I shared. The only difference was that Duncan could actually play cricket; I am a hopeless cricketer but I absolutely love the game. Rest in peace, Duncan. You will be missed but you will never be forgotten. I extend my condolences to the family.

(Time expired)