




Speech By
Robert Skelton

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

Record of Proceedings, 17 June 2021

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Mr SKELTON** (Nicklin—ALP) (6.20 pm): I rise in support of the appropriation bills for the 2021-22 budget. Before I go on, I would like to offer my condolences to the family of Duncan Pegg. He was a great member and an excellent parliamentarian. It is a great loss that we all share.

Onto the budget, and it is a terrific Labor budget. How good is it to be a Queenslander? We may have lost Origin 1, but as the Treasurer explained when handing down this budget, we are ahead of all the other states in the important economic indicators. I thank the Palaszczuk Labor government and the people of Queensland who have united to recover, and we are doing that sensationally.

The challenges that we face are correctly the focus of this budget: infrastructure, public health, education and social housing. Underpinning this investment in the future, we are creating jobs, jobs and—wait for it—more jobs. It is a Labor budget with Labor values backing Queensland workers and their families.

On the Sunshine Coast \$730 million is being spent on infrastructure, creating 2,300 jobs. So many of my local tradespeople are benefitting from this construction bonanza. An amount of \$1.4 billion is being invested in health services, \$140.5 million in education and \$38.5 million for social housing. We are on the road to recovery and so is the electorate of Nicklin. As a community and a state, the positive and immediate actions that have been taken regarding the pandemic have put us in the best position of any state in the country.

I thank the member for Miller and his department for all the work they are doing and continue to do in my electorate: the Beerburrum to Nambour rail upgrade stage 1; pedestrian refuge on the Yandina South connection road; and widening works on Kiamba Road, from Image Flat Road to Wattle Road. These are some, but there are other projects that will ease the burden of congestion and unblock the arteries of the Sunshine Coast so good services and people can get to where they are needed.

I would also like to say thank you for the allocation of \$20 million for the Sunshine Coast Stadium. I would like to acknowledge my friend the member for Caloundra. We are going for the NRL bid for the Dolphins and we do have an upcoming Olympics. We would like to be considered on the Sunshine Coast. This is a responsible government that gets things done.

The Queensland public health service has been critical as we navigate the ravages of the unforeseen COVID-19 pandemic. The Palaszczuk Labor government has allocated a record spend of \$22.2 billion over this budget cycle. An amount of \$1.4 billion of this is allocated to services on the Sunshine Coast. In my electorate of Nicklin, Nambour General Hospital will have \$31 million spent on it this financial year as it transforms into a subacute facility. This is in addition to restoring frontline services on the Sunshine Coast to the tune of 310 extra doctors, 979 extra nurses and 72 extra paramedics since the Palaszczuk government was elected in 2015, and these figures will continue to grow as they are needed. I really must say I appreciate the agility of our health system as we had

COVID cases just days before the Sunshine Coast show. The speed that extra vaccinations became available and the quick activation of an additional testing site at Caloundra aerodrome ensured that the show did go on. That demonstrates a fast-acting and responsive government getting things done.

The education system has had \$140.5 million allocated to schools on the Sunshine Coast. The local schools that will benefit are: Burnside State High School, which will see work started on a new performing arts facility; Chevallum State School, a refurbishment of block 15; Nambour State College, refurbishment of block M including five learning spaces; and Yandina State School, a senior playground upgrade. I know that many schools in my electorate, particularly the older ones, are struggling with increased demand and old, run-down facilities. I hope to have some of the maintenance funds allocated to those schools. The Palaszczuk Labor government can be trusted with education. We owe it to our children to get things done.

I am pleased to see the record spend on social housing delivered in this budget. I look forward to the completion of 16 units off Arundell Avenue in Nambour, which will be delivered in September. Eight of these dwellings are platinum standard and eight are gold standard. This means that they will be home to some of our most disadvantaged. In addition, I noted that funds have been allocated to NGOs in the electorate: Coast2Bay housing group and Kyabra Community Association, both located in Nambour. Across the Sunshine Coast many other organisations have likewise been funded. A Palaszczuk Labor government committed to getting things done.

Whilst we are talking about the budget I would like to mention something regarding funds but on a much more micro scale. How good are community gambling benefit grants? You can embark on huge projects such as hospitals, roads, schools et cetera. Indeed we must. When one of these many community groups are afforded one of these grants, it is just so pleasing. It is personal and means so much to these groups. I am sure that all members in this chamber appreciate the work of the Attorney-General's office in providing these grants. It demonstrates community and government working together to get things done.

The farmers' and fishermen's friend, the member for Ferny Grove, has visited my electorate and enjoyed a bit of time at the Sunshine Coast, cracking a whip and impressing the public. The new glasshouse at the Maroochy research facility is now complete. The work done there that supports our primary producers is truly amazing. I look forward to the official opening.

Work is nearly completed on the new police station in Nambour. At long last our officers can move out of the portable buildings that they have endured for so long. It is on track for scheduled completion in September this year. I look forward to joining the minister on Monday to oversee the work that is getting done. The new Cooroy Police Station is in the planning phase and work is due to start soon with an opening date of 2023—in the same month. The additional staff to the region will be most welcome when the appropriate facilities are completed to accommodate them.

Finally, with regards to skills, there is more support for our TAFE college, specialising in courses in the growth jobs in our region such as nursing, aged care and hospitality to name but a few. There is more funding for our small businesses who in the regional areas like the hinterland are big employers. The minister visited and spoke with some of the business community earlier in the year and has acted. The chambers of commerce will get a chance to talk with the Treasurer next week thanks to the member for Caloundra and his chamber. The Palaszczuk Labor government and the ministers listen and get things done.

Mr Speaker has reviewed and approved my budget speech for incorporation. As such, I ask that the remainder of my speech be incorporated into the *Record of Proceedings*.

The speech read as follows—

Justice:

Speaker, Thank you to the Member for Waterford.

The commitment of funds to tackle the social issues that prevail in not just mine but every electorate in sometimes different ways. We have seen important and protective legislation pass in this house.

A continued commitment over four years to tackle domestic violence and provide family services is completely necessary.

The sense of community and the various not for profit groups that offer respite and care in Nicklin will benefit from a more sensitive and far-sighted government.

Responsible government looking after the most vulnerable Queenslanders. A government committed to getting things done.

Local Government:

Speaker, With gratitude to the Deputy Premier and Member for Murrumba,

This state government invests in the community. The beautiful rural gem of Cooroy has benefited from this government's far-sighted support of Local Government initiatives. An almost \$3 mill commitment to the Hinterland Adventure Playground that will be completed in December this year and the Butter Factory fencing, has been gratefully received.

Nambour Aquatic Centre splash and slide and play zone.

Yandina Cricket Club, and upgrade to amenities for females and all abilities.

Speaker, this tiny snapshot of the good, community support that Nicklin has benefited from, in this budget only demonstrates the commitment of the Palaszczuk government to the well-being of its people.

Tourism, Innovation and Sport:

Speaker, Commendation to the Member for Sandgate.

The Nambour Crushers Rugby League Club upgrades to the clubhouse incorporating female change rooms, kitchen, training and meeting rooms. These are in the planning phase with construction due to start early next year.

The Palmwoods Cricket Club and Hinterland Blues shared facility has risen out of the ground and is due to be finished later this year.

Tree Tops mini adventure playground is now open.

It looks likely that not only the people of Nicklin will benefit but people from across the state.

Economic facts

Latest economic data shows that household spending, dwelling approvals, dwelling investment, construction starts, all growing faster than the rest of Australia.

Data just in from the Australian Bureau of Statistics in particular show that the Economic Recovery Plan is working.

The unemployment rate in Queensland posted the largest fall in the nation, falling to 5.4%—now below its pre-COVID level.

Employment increased by 32,300 last month—more than 1,000 jobs created every day. Queensland is now 84,900 jobs above its pre-COVID level in March last year—the highest in the nation. And the Queensland labour market did all of this while the participation rate—the share of people in work or seeking work—increased to 66.6%, almost half a percentage point above the national average.

The Palaszczuk Government has added 337,400 jobs since we came to office. And our Budget continues that good work.

Our domestic economy by 3% over the past 12 months, one-and-a-half times more than the national economy at just 1.9%.

We have created more jobs since the depths of the pandemic than anywhere else in Australia. Queensland has added 253,200 jobs since May 2020—more than any other state or territory. There are 54,900 more jobs in Queensland now than there were before the pandemic—again, more than any other state or territory.

Budget facts

Deficits

Compared to the last budget, Queensland deficits much smaller, showing a collective \$6 billion improvement.

The deficits get progressively smaller as the economy strengthens over the forward estimates.

We return to operating balance in 2024-25 with a small surplus of \$153 million.

Of the four largest Governments in Australia to go into deficit due to COVID, Queensland is the first to show a surplus.

Debt

Net debt for Queensland 2021-22 is \$25.5 billion. This represents a \$9.7 billion decrease in debt, relative to our forecasts last year. That is the single biggest reduction in net debt ever recorded by the Queensland Government.

We have been able to achieve that reduction in debt without cutting services.

We have done it without any new or increased taxes.

And we have done it without sacking public servants and without selling public assets.

Debt Comparisons

Our net debt \$25.5 billion for 2021-22, compares to:

\$67.8 billion in New South Wales,

\$102 billion in Victoria, and

\$729 billion for the Commonwealth.

In the final year of the forward estimates (2024-25), our net debt will be \$42.6 billion, compares to:

\$96.7 billion for New South Wales (2023-24, Budget next week),

\$156.3 billion for Victoria, and

\$980.6 billion for the Commonwealth.

Lower net debt means we are better able to respond to future shocks, such as natural disasters, with additional spending

Speaker, This, budget has something for everyone and the Ministers that I may have missed are contributing to Nicklin in an indirect way by increasing the output of their respective departments and I have provided but a brief snapshot of my region.

The economic recovery is at full throttle because of a Labor Palaszczuk government. Queensland, the Hinterland and its people are resilient and have survived the worst of the world-wide Covid 19 pandemic and global recession.

The Premier, Deputy Premier, Treasurer and the cabinet of this Palaszczuk government have led Queensland through this difficult time. The mandate of majority is proof of the belief that Queensland has in the Labor Party to lead them through tough times. As we always have historically.

As representative of the people of Nicklin. I fully support this budget and its commitment to my region and our great state, our proud people.

To reiterate, The Palaszczuk Labor Government has been endorsed by the people as it is for the people. There is a plan that is already in progress. Queenslanders and the Palaszczuk Labor government are getting things done.