




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (2.15 pm): I rise today to offer a response to the government's 2021-22 budget. Those on the benches opposite have exclaimed that this budget is a typical Labor budget, and right they are. This is a typical Labor budget, and I say that because it is a budget which has more holes than you can poke a stick at. It is a budget which, on the surface, might sound alright, but once you look beyond the glossy brochure, you begin to wonder, 'Where is the money?' A typical Labor budget, indeed.

There are line items in this budget which have no allocations against them. It beggars belief. In his budget speech, the Treasurer was quick to make a billion dollar promise here, a \$2 billion promise there, but when you look in the budget papers, there is nothing—not a cent allocated to some of the funds he mentioned.

The opposition highlighted this yesterday and we will continue to do so. Those on this side of the House will back sensible and honest measures, and that is a fact. However, what we will not do is stand idly by and let those opposite get away with sneaky accounting and empty words.

Members in this chamber understand my passion and desire to improve health care here in Queensland. Every last Queensland, to a man, woman and child, deserves quality health care. Our incredible doctors, nurses and paramedics and all of our other amazing clinicians strive every day to make that a reality. Their tireless and selfless work is truly remarkable, and I commend them all for it. It is a tough but rewarding job.

As a registered nurse myself, I know what it is like on the front line. What we in this place cannot and should not do is make their already tough job any tougher. That should not happen, but I fear that it is. With no vision to end the crisis which has beset Queensland Health, this budget leaves Queenslanders wanting. When it comes to empty words and empty promises, there is no more obvious example in this budget than the \$2 billion Hospital Building Fund. So flimsy is the Hospital Building Fund that it is not even given a line item. That is right; the \$2 billion Hospital Building Fund, the centrepiece of the Labor Party's health policy, is not even given a line in the government's own budget documents. How can that be? How is that right? It is an empty promise, an empty line item and it should leave every Queensland, feeling empty. This government's plan to improve our health crisis is truly an empty one. It is little wonder then that this government is losing control of our health system.

The opposition welcomes any effort made to increase capacity within our health care system. It is desperately needed, we know this and it is what the experts tell us. But by the government's own admission under the non-existent Hospital Building Fund, we will not see further commitments until 2024-25.

We need a solution to this problem now. It is not a problem for tomorrow, next month, next year or in four years time. This is a problem right now. Queensland Health is in crisis right now. The government is losing control of the public health system right now. We need a solution to this problem and, sadly, with this budget I do not believe we have it.

Where is the vision? Where is the genuine plan to fix the crisis? I said yesterday that it is incumbent on those governing a state jurisdiction to effectively resource and manage a healthcare system because, after all, one of the core functions of a state government is to run our public hospitals. Those opposite are the only ones in this chamber who hold the position to fix the mess. The budget offered a perfect opportunity to do so.

Instead of getting on with the job they are only interested in blaming others. They have blamed the Commonwealth. They have blamed elderly patients. They have blamed honest Queenslanders for showing up to emergency departments. It is now time to hold a mirror up because this is what it would reflect. It would show that ambulance ramping across the state is the highest in a generation—it is at 40 per cent. Even in the darkest days of the Bligh government, the number never climbed that high. In fact it is 10 per cent more. The reflection would also show we have an elective surgery waiting list of 55,000 people. That number has increased by nearly 25,000 Queenslanders in six years. Let us not forget the waiting list for the waiting list. There are 220,000 people languishing there.

That is what those opposite would see if they were brave enough to own up to their own problems. Sadly, it is not a record to be proud of. It is a record that I fear will only worsen in the months and years ahead. Queenslanders ought to be able to see these numbers. They should know how long it takes to be seen when they arrive by ambulance at a hospital. They should know how many people are waiting to have surgery. They should know how our emergency departments are performing. It is important that this information be open and transparent. After all, these figures effectively take the temperature of how our public health system is performing. Those opposite are now refusing to release that information. Most of the data available on the government's own website is from 2020.

I have already referenced the statewide ambulance ramping figure today—the figure of 40 per cent. The people behind that number have spoken up. These Queenslanders depend on our paramedics to arrive promptly to an emergency in their hour of need. At the moment, through no fault of their own, our paramedics are stuck on hospital ramps, waiting to off-load patients. It is happening because our system is being mismanaged. Compared to data from around the country from February, which was the last time Queensland's ramping figures were released, we sit last. Forty per cent is as bad as it gets.

Remember that that number is higher at some of our hospitals which are most under the pump. There are now six hospitals across our state which have ramping numbers of 50 per cent or higher. That means at some of these facilities Queenslanders are more likely to wait on an ambulance stretcher for longer than clinically recommended than they are not. That is a frightening realisation.

Whilst it might be lost on those opposite, it is not lost on the clinical fraternity. We know today that the AMAQ called a secret crisis meeting last night to address the ramping issue. I will not speak for them, but to me that sounds like some of our most trusted doctors across the state are not confident that those opposite can fix the ramping crisis. In fact, the AMAQ called this ramping conundrum a 'vicious cycle of crisis upon crisis'. I could not think of a more apt description.

Some hospital and health services across Queensland are budgeted to receive less funding this coming financial year than they spent in this one. Take the Gold Coast HHS for instance. This financial year the HHS spent \$1.82 billion in providing health services for Gold Coasters. This coming financial year Labor has budgeted \$1.77 billion. We are expecting them to do more with less.

Earlier this year the Auditor-General identified that 11 of the state's 16 HHSs recorded an operating loss last year. When the state is handing out less to some HHSs than they spent last year, how could the minister possibly expect these local health services to improve their financial position? My concern is that this government is setting up some of our HHSs to fail. Right now, more than ever, we need these organisations to work.

Together with this, some of our HHSs are also budgeted for a reduction in staff. Central Queensland HHS, Children's Health Queensland HHS, Metro South HHS and Torres and Cape HHS are all staring down the barrel of fewer staff. That means fewer hands on deck for those who deliver care. Metro South HHS and Central Queensland HHS can ill afford that. Some of their ramping figures are the worst in the state at the likes of Logan and Ipswich hospitals. Of course, Rockhampton Base Hospital is ground zero for regional ramping—49 per cent of patients are ramped there.

The LNP has made some responsible and meaningful suggestions to improve our public hospital system. Our plan to make emergency room data available to the public in real time, improve and better resource triaging practices in our emergency departments and to be honest and open about bed resourcing in our hospitals are sensible suggestions.

Access to good health care should not just be about those in our major centres. Regardless of one's postcode, Queenslanders deserve quality care. We want to ensure that, where it is practicable and safe, our doctors and nurses in the bush should be better equipped to treat people locally. They should be better equipped so that they are able to care for the patients in their local communities and ease pressure on our larger hospitals in major centres.

We know what a record health budget means to Queenslanders under Labor. Those opposite cannot hide behind the three words—record health budget—any longer. Those words are meaningless. They are meaningless to Queenslanders whose grandmother has had a fall or whose father has had a stroke or whose daughter is having an asthma attack. Queenslanders are realising that their health outcomes are being compromised by a mismanaged system, and Queenslanders will not stand for it. Labor is losing control of our public health system and this budget does nothing to stop the crisis from further unfolding.

When it comes to the government's election commitments, we will hold the government to account for each and every promise and on behalf of every community they impact. That includes mine—the best electorate in Queensland. Once again, the residents of Mudgeeraba have been left behind by Labor, and I am furious. As a community, we have been working together as we recover from the worst of the pandemic. Our residents have put in an incredible effort, doing the right thing so our lives can return to normal. It has still been a tough year for many in my electorate, with many businesses impacted by the on-again off-again lockdowns throughout the country. Families remain separated, including my own, with inconsistencies over travel and quarantine exemptions continuing for many who are facing difficult times with their loved ones. We support following the health advice, but we also support transparency and openness about the decisions. Labor continues the spin and trickery.

This year's budget was again reannouncements and rebadging. There is really nothing new for Mudgeeraba. Let me take the House through some of the projects Mudgeeraba locals fought for, but missed out on again in Labor's budget. We missed out on vital funding to keep My Community Legal in Robina afloat. My Community Legal provides free legal advice to those who cannot afford a lawyer, including some of our most vulnerable residents—women and children fleeing domestic violence; families at risk of becoming homeless. My Community Legal does so much for our community, but they do not receive funding from the state government to deliver these important services.

We also missed out on more female changing facilities for grassroots sports clubs. They have tried to pull the wool over our eyes by reannouncing the Robina Raptors Rugby League Club female change rooms. Let me tell members, not one nail has been hammered. As we know, the sports rorts scandal exposed the heinous truth about Labor's funding for sports clubs in Queensland. If you are not in a Labor electorate you are not worth it. Do not worry, I will keep fighting for the sporting clubs of Mudgeeraba to get their fair share. It is 2021. Female players deserve the same facilities as the blokes. For all their words, there is not much action from those opposite when it comes to equity in participation.

Lucky we were not holding our breath waiting for the train at Merrimac. Yes, there is a station promised, which was promised two elections ago, but there is no time line or details about the process. We need better public transport to take pressure off our roads. Speaking of which, we have missed out again on so many vital road infrastructure projects in this budget of smoke and mirrors. I am fighting for road improvements for safety sake in my electorate.

We need vital intersection upgrades at Mudgeeraba and Tallai roads. We need signals at the Gooding Drive roundabout to stop accidents and keep people safe. We need \$1.5 million to raise the Austinville Causeway so more drivers are not swept off the road in floods and communities remain connected in times of natural disasters. We need proper upgrades to Worongary Road and other main thoroughfares, not just the patchwork of pothole repairs that locals are struggling with.

While I am talking about safety, let us talk about combatting the scourge of hooning. I cannot tell members how often I have written to the minister and his department pleading for CCTV cameras in hooning hotspots in Worongary, Gilston and Tallai. If we have this investment in infrastructure, our hardworking police officers would have a chance of catching and locking up these offenders.

I will also keep fighting for the future of our community—our children. I am thrilled that the Numinbah Valley State School and the Mudgeeraba Special School, which does such wonderful work with a very special cohort of students, will get \$6 million for new classrooms, but we need so much more.

Our community desperately needs a new state high school west of the M1. Enrolments at our local schools are booming. Local high schools are reaching capacity, and there is no scope for any future development. Local families want to stay in the area from prep to their final exams. Labor likes to talk big about tourism and the environment. There is nothing to boost those things in Mudgeeraba in this budget. We desperately need better signage for tourists at Springbrook. We need better facilities and parking so that more people can explore our fabulous hinterland.

We need the funds to protect the World Heritage listed wilderness and the greenspaces closer to communities. Years ago the Mudgeeraba Creek was a thriving ecosystem and where it was possible to spot platypus. We need the government to fund the reinvigoration of Mudgeeraba Creek so that locals and wildlife can enjoy the area once again.

I want to put on the record my determination to keep fighting for Mudgeeraba, so the residents can have the roads, schools and education they deserve.