



Speech By
Dale Last


MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (11.18 pm): I rise to speak to the appropriation bills. It was Alexander Hamilton, one of the founding fathers of the United States, who said—

Necessity, especially in politics, often occasions false hopes, false reasonings, and a system of measures, correspondingly erroneous.

What we saw in the delivery of this budget was a lot of false hope, a large serving of false reasoning and a system of measures that go beyond erroneous and border on negligence. I will start with the Burdekin electorate where the false hope delivered by the Treasurer is plain to see. It was only seconds into the Treasurer's budget speech, with the Minister for Health sitting right there beside him, that he gave well-deserved praise to our health staff. Seconds later, the Treasurer stated that we must ensure our health system has the infrastructure and the resources it needs to meet future demands.

For those living in Moranbah or Clermont, the tributes were nothing but false hope. The budget documents talk about a new hospital in Moranbah, but there is no money. If we go to the budget document, funding is entirely absent in forward estimates for the construction of this facility. According to the *Courier-Mail*—

A Queensland Health spokesperson said the specific allocation of funding to the new Moranbah Hospital would depend on the outcomes of necessary upcoming design development work ...

Rewind to 16 September 2020, and a media statement from the new Deputy Premier commences with—

The Palaszczuk Government has launched planning for the expansion of the Mackay Base Hospital and the redevelopments of the Bowen and Moranbah hospitals ...

The Deputy Premier went on to commit \$500 million to that project. Two years later, what do we have? More words. The commitment from the now Deputy Premier is worthless. The commitment from the Labor candidate is worthless. That is for a very good reason—because there is no money in the budget, just more false hope. I visited this hospital with the shadow minister for health only a fortnight ago. Yes, we desperately need a new hospital in Moranbah. We also need some answers to simple questions such as, 'When can we expect this project to start? Will it cater for future growth?' The long-suffering community at Moranbah deserves better. They deserve a health service and health care in that community the same as what exists in the south-east corner of this state. They should not have to drive hundreds of kilometres for a simple blood test, to get a scan or to see a specialist.

Down the road in Clermont, the locals have endured more than four years of false hope. When we talk about erroneous measures, we only have to look at the pathetic excuses for not fixing the GP crisis that Clermont faces. Despite all the talk about health, there is no money in this budget to employ a permanent GP at the Clermont Hospital—more false hope. For four long years that community has been waiting for a permanent doctor at that hospital. They deserve better.

When it comes to road funding in the Burdekin electorate, we have even more false hope. In the lead-up to the recent federal election we had a commitment to finally seal May Downs Road and the Kilcummin Diamond Downs Road, an announcement welcomed by the LGAQ. A few months later, the hope that we may finally see some decent roads is dashed by this budget. I also note there is no money in the budget to match the federal government's commitment to the replacement of the Phillips Creek Bridge on the Saraji Road. This government has failed to address the roads that we call goat tracks that crisscross regional Queensland—the goat tracks that restrict trade and the growth of businesses, the goat tracks that destroy school buses and prevent get kids getting to school, the goat tracks that when an ambulance responds to an emergency contribute to that ambulance ending up damaged and the health of the paramedic put at risk.

It is not just the roads that need to be sealed. We have works on the Bruce Highway around Bowen that are at a complete standstill and have been for nearly four months. The work sites have been abandoned and, according to locals, are becoming like something out of a *Mad Max* movie—more false promises.

We on this side of the House will acknowledge the positives while holding this government to account. I note that in this budget there are investments in projects at schools throughout the Burdekin electorate, upgrades that I have fought long and hard for, such as the additional classrooms at Moranbah State High School and the Moranbah East State School. I welcome those announcements. I am passionate about education and about students in these rural and regional areas having access to the same level of education and opportunities as their city cousins. I do not think that is too much to ask for.

However, I remind the minister that the students at Middlemount Community School are still using a manual arts building that has a dirt floor. That is right—a dirt floor. Take me to a school in the south-east corner of the state with a classroom that still has a dirt floor. That is my challenge to those members opposite: take me to a classroom in their communities that has a dirt floor and show me, because that is what our students are putting up with in the bush. It is a disgrace.

Despite the projects to improve school facilities in my electorate, education faces immense challenges. We still have chronic staff shortages. Classes are combined, reducing the focus on the specific lessons that will allow students throughout the Burdekin electorate to achieve their dreams. In Moranbah we still have no technology teacher.

Recently, I met with a number of school principals from my electorate who highlighted their concerns at the lack of support they are getting from this state government. Chronic teacher shortages are impacting their ability to offer a decent curriculum to country students, not to mention the burnout facing teachers across the electorate. What makes the false promises and the ignorance of key services even harder to take is the fact that centres like Moranbah, Clermont, Middlemount and Dysart are in the heart of the coal country. I am not afraid to mention that word. I am not afraid to mention the word 'coal' because these are the centres that provided \$7.3 billion in royalties to the Queensland budget in 2021-22. These are the centres that will provide an additional \$1.2 billion to the Queensland coffers over the next four years. This mob are quick to get their hands on that bucket of money. We have heard it tonight. Tonight we have heard members talk about getting their hands in that bucket of money.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Pause the clock. I ask the member to withdraw that unparliamentary language.

Mr LAST: I withdraw. When the centres in the very area that require the extra royalties have their essential services ignored and are fed false promises after false promises, is it any wonder they do not believe the Treasurer's claims that all of that \$1.2 billion will be going to regional Queensland? I am proud of the resources sector. I will back my coalminers every day of the week. It galls me to see the royalties from my electorate flowing into the south-east corner of the state. It galls me to see that we are given the breadcrumbs in the bush and that our infrastructure is disgracefully underfunded. We have to go begging to this state government for even the most basic of needs. It is about time that we received our fair slice of the pie in the bush. It is about time some of those royalties started flowing back to regional and rural Queensland.

I move on to my shadow portfolios centred around Queenslanders or keeping Queenslanders safe. What do we see? More false hope. The thing about false hope is that eventually it shows up government members for what they are. Luckily for Queenslanders, it did not take long to prove beyond

a shadow of a doubt that this government's so-called commitment for 2,025 extra police staff by 2025 was just more false hope. The proof is in the government's own budget documents—Budget Paper No. 2 to be precise. Sadly for the Treasurer and the police minister, the false hope has been revealed due to their egos. Sadly for Queensland, would members believe that this government has added just five extra full-time police officers in the past 12 months? Can members believe that? We wonder why we question its ability to deliver 2,025 extra personnel before 2025. This is an increase, according to the government's own budget documents, of 0.02 per cent of police staffing when during the same period unlawful entry charges against juveniles in Queensland increased by 30 per cent—yes, a 30 per cent increase in one year—and unlawful use of a motor vehicle charges against juveniles increased by 27 per cent. There were five extra full-time officers over the same period that saw a 41 per cent increase in the rate of total personal offences and an increase in total property offences, according to the government's budget documents.

The failure of this government to address crime did not end there. The slashing of funding for safe night precincts in the police budget means that in centres right throughout Queensland there are fewer first response officers available when people dial triple 0. We cannot withdraw significant police resources from nightclub precincts without having a significant impact on the level of service provided. I know because I set up the safe night precinct in Townsville. I know what it means on a busy Friday or Saturday night to have 20 or 30 police in the nightclub precinct to deal with the issues that arise in those localities. The minister can talk all he likes about a record police budget, but when cuts to the number of officers on duty, increases in crime, increases in reoffending and the addition of only five full-time officers is business as usual, that is a failed police budget.

As at 30 June 2021, built capacity in Queensland's prisons was 9,618 and, according to last year's budget documents, facility utilisation was 125.8 per cent. In last year's budget for Queensland Corrective Services there was over \$340 million dedicated to building new facilities or additional beds. I am sure officers in those facilities look forward to the overcrowding finally being addressed. I am sure those officers' families look forward to a safer workplace for those officers.

Sadly, this is more false hope because the facility utilisation this year was still 125.8 per cent. In other words, nothing has changed. Officers and other staff still face the same dangers thanks to a corrections system that has failed to keep pace. Sadly, it is not just in the area of infrastructure that this government has failed. Despite no change to the level of overcrowding and an increase in the rate of serious assaults on officers, Queensland Corrective Services will gain just nine extra full-time equivalent staff. I must point out that the nine extras are staff not necessarily custodial officers.

It is somewhat ironic that just this week here in the chamber we had the minister trying to lecture members about how this government is quite rightly investing in the brave men and women who work in our correctional centres, but failed to mention the increase in serious assaults that are directly linked to the overcrowding that the same minister has overseen.

Moving on to the fire and emergency services portfolio, I am glad to see an increase of 92 staff in this budget, especially given the commitment for 40 additional staff to support SES activities. Given the decline in volunteer numbers over recent years, an increase in capability to respond to disasters or emergencies will be welcomed by every Queenslanders. What I find alarming is the almost \$200 million blowout in supplies and services. I have no doubt that the minister or the Treasurer will give the stock standard COVID response, but it must be noted that this is for supplies and services and not employee expenses.

When it comes to rural and regional affairs, this budget is underwhelming despite the Treasurer's claims. Agriculture—one of regional Queensland's key industries—scored literally two sentences in the Treasurer's budget speech. Life in rural and regional Queensland is different to life here in the south-east.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Pause the clock. Members, there is way too much background noise. Please take your conversations outside.

Mr LAST: Roads are the lifeblood of regional Queensland so to have just one mention in the Treasurer's budget speech sends a clear message that people in the regions have had one of their key issues overlooked yet again. We welcome the announcement of a new 10-year deal with the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Pause the clock. Members I just gave you a warning. Take your conversations outside or I will start warning members.

Mr LAST: That service is absolutely crucial for those people who live in the bush.

While I agree with Alexander Hamilton when it comes to the dangers of false hope, I disagree that false hope is necessary, especially in politics. What is necessary is honesty. The broken promises by this Treasurer show how desperate this government has become in trying to deliver for Queensland.

As the Leader of the Opposition has made abundantly clear, those of us on this side of the House will support good policy but will also call out bad policy. I will not stand by and let people from rural and regional Queensland be taken for granted and overlooked. I will continue to fight on their behalf for the resources and services they deserve because if this government continues to peddle false hope and if this government continues to break their promises then Queenslanders deserve a better government.