



Speech By
James Lister


MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL;

APPROPRIATION BILL

REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (2.34 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on this year's budget bills on behalf of the people of Southern Downs. I want to say at the outset that this budget, like all, has some good elements to it and some bad. I will start with some of the bad because I felt that some of the contributions that have been made by government members, in particular led by the Treasurer, deserve some scrutiny and rebuttal. The refrain that comes from the government is, 'You have a choice: you either spend this much or you cut.' That assertion is false. I think it goes to the lack of understanding of the Labor government that the money is not there in unlimited quantities and that taxpayers expect that money appropriated by this parliament is applied effectively. I would say that the government is in no position to argue that it gets full value for money from every expenditure that it makes. I believe that the government tends to pay too much for things, it tends to manage things poorly, and it tends to employ far more people for a given result than they should.

The people of Southern Downs, as a general principle, like to see government that runs a tight ship because that is the nature of the people of my electorate.

Mr Krause: Hardworking.

Mr LISTER: I take that interjection from my honourable friend, the member for Scenic Rim—hardworking, that is right. He neighbours my electorate and I think our communities have much in common. I think it is a complete fiction to taunt the opposition and say that if we have criticisms of the appropriation—how it has been conducted, how it is proposed to be raised and how it is proposed to be spent—then that equals a reduction in service. I think the government has a poor record of delivering on services for the money it spends and, in spite of record budget after record budget after record budget across the board and in all of the individual fields, service standards are falling. NAPLAN results are going backwards, ambulance ramping is up, hospital waiting lists are up. We see all across the board that government services are not being delivered efficiently.

When this side of the House questions the budget, it is not a suggestion that we would deliver less; on the contrary, we would deliver more because it is not just about the money, it is about what you get for the money. I know that I speak certainly for the people of Southern Downs who have to balance a budget, who have to try to make ends meet with what they have in this environment of rising costs. They cannot simply say to the boss, 'I demand this much more.' They cannot simply sell their farm products for 'this much more'. Their pensions will not simply go up. However, this government has a proclivity for simply taxing the productive private sector of the economy, which funds the public sector, and we have seen, throughout my time as a member of parliament, that there is a widening gap between the size of government and the size of the population in the private sector which funds it. That is unsustainable.

For a government that prides itself on striving for environmental sustainability, they should ask the question: how will our kids, our grandkids and their grandkids fund the things we need if we cannot do it now without borrowing more and more and making the government as it is a larger and larger share of the economy? I leave that question to the House.

We see a lot of waste. I will give a couple of examples here. I know that none of these on their own prove a point, but there is a pattern of unwise expenditure here which irritates me and my electorate. I often talk about the \$200 million spent on the Wellcamp facility. I can imagine the Wagners having a beer after their negotiations with the government over that and laughing themselves into a paroxysm: 'What chumps! The government paying \$200 million for that?' I suspect that they made a very tidy profit on that. That is money that could have been spent on dog fencing, on hospital beds or perhaps on the mental health services that my electorate needs—or perhaps, as a novel idea, they may not have had to tax as much because they would not have needed to waste so much of our money.

I refer to \$111 million to unprivatise two prisons. I often refer tongue-in-cheek to my honourable friend the member for Cairns and the \$100,000 for a weight loss app for dogs, the \$250,000 to rename a hospital and two local examples. I note that the Minister for Transport and Main Roads is in the chamber and I thank him for coming to my electorate. I had a brief discussion with him about the roads in my electorate and I am particularly concerned about the stretch of the New England Highway from Severnlea to Ballandean, and he knows that that has been a problem.

There is not much point in apportioning blame, but nevertheless \$20 million was expended on a project that the government waxed lyrical about to improve the safety of that stretch of the New England Highway. The road by any accounts—and certainly by the accounts that matter, which are my electors who were in uproar over what happened—was far worse than when they started. That is after \$20 million. I do not know how much that fix is costing. I understand the department is working on that now, and I thank them for that.

Also on transport, a few years ago there was an example where Queensland Rail laid 6,000 sleepers along the Wallangarra line, which runs through my electorate, between Stanthorpe and Wallangarra. They threw them onto the side of the track, which I believe is the normal practice so that the crews can go in and replace the sleepers. They stayed on the side of the track for months. They were growing legs and walking, as they do; hardwood sleepers are expensive. I kicked up quite a fuss about this. Eventually, in order to assuage the press, I suspect, a bus load of navvies from Brisbane on Anzac Day no less, obviously being paid very handsomely, turned up to shuffle a few sleepers around.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Martin): Pause the clock. Member for Southern Downs, I think you have used a couple of words that are unparliamentary. I ask you to withdraw.

Mr LISTER: I withdraw. I was told by the locals who saw it happen that they came to Stanthorpe or Ballandean to shuffle some sleepers around. In the end, all of those sleepers were collected and then taken somewhere else. This sort of bungling is terrible. When I asked a question on notice of the minister about the cost of that, the minister did not answer the question. He answered some elements of the question but would not quote the figure. These are the sorts of expenditure which hardworking Queenslanders look at and say ought to be stopped so they do not have to pay as much tax. However, there are some good elements to this budget and I will talk about them in the context of my electorate of Southern Downs and I will offer some construction feedback.

I want to thank the government. I have written to the Premier to thank her for, one, bringing her government to Stanthorpe earlier this month, which was a wonderful thing for my community. It shone a sidelight onto the many good people in my electorate who make an excellent contribution and whose works are deserving of special attention. When important people come to town it is an opportunity to do that, and I thank her.

I note the Minister for Small Business and Minister for Training is in the chamber. I thank her for meeting with the vice-chancellor of the University of Southern Queensland at the Queensland College of Wine Tourism. I acknowledge and thank the state government for its ongoing partnership to keep that facility open. I say thank you for that to the minister.

I want to thank the government for the \$300 million pipeline that they announced for town water supply from Toowoomba to Warwick. I do not have the details about how exactly this will work and I believe it is a bit early in the budget process to see when and how. I will be looking to see that that project will not involve an excessive impost on the people I represent. I know the Southern Downs Regional Council are mindful of that. I will allow them to comment on the matter. I want to say thank you for that and also for a number of investments that the state government has made. I know Minister Butcher has been a number of times to help with bores, treatment plants and so forth to help with the water shortages in my communities. Of course, the government's funding of the cartage of water to Stanthorpe was very important. I think it is appropriate that I acknowledge and thank the government for those things.

In the case of the pipeline, water pumped from someone else's supply is never a substitute for new water. It does not take an intellectual giant to contemplate the scenario where Brisbane is running short of water, Toowoomba is running short of water and Warwick at the end of the pipeline misses out. We would have to say to ourselves that in that scenario, it would be an unfortunate thing to have to have spent \$300-odd million to put in that pipeline.

I want to make sure that the government does not forget to build the Emu Swamp Dam, which is an important, transformative project in my community. It will provide 700 new full-time jobs in my community. It will increase production by 20 per cent. That is \$60 million at the farm gate of leafy green vegetables, tomatoes and fruit. It will also provide an urban water supply for Stanthorpe and it is the place that had the most urgent shortage of water. That will provide a triple benefit: to the community, to the economy and to the local government that has to provide a water solution for Stanthorpe, which we have seen is desperately needed.

I would like to acknowledge the national parks spending. I mentioned to the minister that I appreciated that money has been spent to improve the day visitors area at Girraween National Park. I have always been critical of the government in the context of national parks because I contend—and I know that some of my honourable friends sitting before me would agree with me—that some of these national parks have become home to invasive pests, weeds, pigs, dogs, deer and so forth—

Mr Krause: Fuel for bushfires.

Mr LISTER:—and fuel for bushfires. I take that interjection from the member for Scenic Rim. We would like to see them managed better. The acquisition of additions to our national park stock are not an end unto themselves but are in fact complementary to the purpose of national parks, which used to be pristine representations of nature. It is no good for us when the government scores points with the conscience stricken latte sippers of the city to say that there are more national parks. However, if people have to live next door to a national park, if they have to operate a farm there that is full of weeds, pigs, dogs and deer, it makes life very hard. I continue to urge the government to focus on that.

On health, I acknowledge the plans to construct a new Toowoomba Hospital. That will be important to my communities because many of the people I represent go to Toowoomba for treatment. I also acknowledge the additional mental health funding, which is very important. I have to say—and I am sure that my colleagues from regional Queensland would agree with me—intentions are great and the money is great and we respect that, but recruiting mental health professionals to these positions, particularly in regional Queensland, can be very difficult. I know some time ago the education minister announced having nurses, doctors and psychologists in schools. That would be a great thing, but none of the positions are filled in my electorate, so more needs to be done there.

While I am on my feet I would like to say that Annette Scott and her predecessor, Dr Peter Gillies, as CEO of the Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service, have been very good to me in my dealings with them. They are very constructive in investigating complaints that I bring to their attention on behalf of my constituents and I thank them for that.

I now turn to police. I thank the government for the announcement of a 24-hour police station for Goondiwindi. However, I am concerned that perhaps we will find quickly that the 24-hour status may not be able to be maintained for a variety of human resources reasons. I want to see that the laws are there to protect the community and keep offenders off the street until they can be seen by the judiciary. This is not a political point I make; it is a point of logic. If young offenders are allowed to remain on the street or in a supervision arrangement that is not particularly restrictive, they are available to go out and commit more crimes. One of the things my communities tell me—and I can assure the House with absolute certainty that this is happening—is that youngsters who are committing these crimes have no respect for the law, so they do not take being on bail as a privilege. It does not concern them. They go out and steal more cars. There was a lamentable act in Goondiwindi recently in which a youngster who was supposed to be on a supervision order was supervised so well that he and his mates were able to steal a car and hit the owner of the car over the head, the young lady who was trying to defend it. Those sorts of things are what animates and irritates the communities I represent.

I say to the government: please do not make this a balancing act between the rights of offenders on one side and the rights of the community. I say we need to protect the community first, restrain the individuals, keep them off the streets and then have that discussion about how to fix the social causes. Any other course of action simply says to the community: you must tolerate this crime until we fix the issues. It is not a simple issue, but it is a very simple priority that I think the government should observe.

Mrs Gerber interjected.

Mr LISTER: Thank you, member for Currumbin; I take the interjection.

I note that we are behind by \$6 billion on the state road maintenance plan. That shows up particularly in my electorate of Southern Downs where the roads have copped a difficult time with floods, rains and so forth. We need to be spending up-front to make sure they are looked after. I spoke to the minister about the Carnarvon Bridge, and I thank him for riding his bike across it one cold morning in Stanthorpe and for his appreciation that that bridge needs to be replaced.

Care Goondiwindi is an excellent organisation in my community which provides a lot of community services. I table for the benefit of the House a letter I wrote to support an application for them to continue to provide community legal services under the Department of Justice and Attorney-General.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 16 October 2020, from the member for Southern Downs, Mr James Lister MP, to Whom It May Concern, regarding Care Goondiwindi tender for community legal assistance [952](#).

I wanted them to have that contract renewed, because we need a local group to do that. Unfortunately, the contract went to an out-of-town firm from Toowoomba. I would like to see that contract returned to Goondiwindi.