



Speech By  
**Lachlan Millar**


**MEMBER FOR GREGORY**

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL (NO. 2)**

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 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (3.54 pm): I am not surprised to find us kicking off the sitting calendar of 2022 by debating these bills to provide extra funding for six departments and the parliament. I do not think the Treasurer is, either. As I said when we debated the 2021 budget, this was a fairytale. Every fairytale should have a happy ending, and the Treasurer's script called for a surprise surplus just in time for the next election. One of the things the surplus relies upon is that the Labor government restrains its spending in order to achieve the target which was set by the Treasurer. As I wrote to my constituents at the time, this was 'highly unlikely' given the Labor government's perfect record of coming back to parliament for extra appropriations for unforeseen expenditure. I see the Treasurer is upholding the record. Here he is having to pass legislation to authorise money for unforeseen expenditure for six departments.

I was expecting to see a lot of smoke about the need to respond to the global pandemic—the old COVID-19 smokescreen, which Queenslanders are heartily sick of. I accept that both the Queensland Police Service and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services genuinely need to claim extra COVID-19 related expenditure—indeed, I congratulate those two departments on the great job they have done—but it is strange that the Treasurer was completely unable to foresee these COVID-19 duties and budget accordingly.

COVID-19 was the excuse he gave for handing down the budget so late. Nearly half of the financial year had already passed. Even having to forecast only seven months of the budget and even knowing COVID-19 had to be factored in, the Treasurer still could not get it right. Part of the reason for this is that Labor's first instinct is to hide unfortunate facts. In my speech to the House when the budget was handed down, I pointed out that the format of the budget papers had been totally changed. This made it difficult, if not impossible, to compare this Queensland budget to those of previous years, let alone compare Queensland's budget to those of other states and territories. It was designed to confuse. It was designed to hide.

Cosy secrecy is just the way the Labor government like to keep things. Annoyingly for them, the Queensland Auditor-General keeps pointing out things like the growing debt and the fact that we are borrowing to keep the lights on. There are other trusted forms of public report card on the Labor government's competence. The CommSec State of the States report ranks Queensland fifth out of six states for overall economic performance and the worst for economic growth.

The truth just has a way of coming out eventually. The thing about the truth is that it really does set you free—free to tackle the problems head-on. We really need the Treasurer to start being truthful. It is almost impossible to respond when you will not tell the truth. It is impossible when you will not consult outside the Labor elites of lawyers, academics and highly paid union officials. You end up not knowing what you do not know. Focus groups cannot tell you. The focus group itself becomes an echo chamber. When you hide things, you cannot solve the problem.

We start this parliamentary sitting year with most Queenslanders knowing that the Labor government has some serious problems with transparency and integrity. The need for these two appropriation bills only months after the Treasurer brought down his budget is part of this story, too. You cannot do accurate forecasts for the departments if public servants are afraid to tell the truth, have lost heart and cannot advise you in the interests of the state.

It does not surprise me that there are six departments with unforeseen expenditure barely three months after the budget was handed down. It does surprise me that in this bill there are two departments without unforeseen COVID-19 expenditure. Where are the Department of Education's COVID-19 costs and where is the funding request for Queensland Health in Appropriation Bill (No. 2)? The only budget increase they received this financial year was from the federal government to cover COVID-19 costs. Instead of support, the Queensland Treasurer imposed cuts—sorry, 'efficiency dividends'.

This bill should contain funding to help our hospital and health services urgently restart elective surgery while remaining on COVID-19 alert. Does the Treasurer make no attempt to fund this? I have constituents who are desperate for treatments that are delayed due to COVID-19, and all I hear is, 'We are slowly gearing up for elective surgery to restart.' We cannot take this at a stroll. The effect on people's health—indeed, their life expectancy—is a real and devastating issue.

Five months ago, one of my constituents was told by the Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service that she has cervical cancer. She was told that a second appointment was needed to discuss what treatments may be available. That was last August. Five times that appointment has been cancelled or rescheduled. She still has not been seen to discuss her treatment options. Can you imagine the anxiety she and her husband are going through at the moment? She is a much loved and needed mother of two young daughters. She has previously had a cancerous lesion removed from her cervix. She should be a priority, but the hard truth is that she is not even a statistic on the waiting list yet. She is not on the waiting list for the waiting list. It is the Queensland hospital system that is letting her down and letting her young family down.

Another constituent suffered a serious spinal injury in a road accident just before Christmas. He was brought to the PA Hospital from Longreach and given emergency spinal surgery. He was then left for weeks in the orthopaedic ward because although there were beds available in the spinal unit there were not sufficient nurses to staff it. This does not approach the best practice that we need here in Queensland.

As the Treasurer brings these bills to the Queensland parliament, where is the request for the necessary extra funding for our hospitals to restart treating Queenslanders with conditions other than COVID-19? This is not just a matter of catching up and clearing the waiting lists. It has had serious impacts for surgeons, nurses and allied health graduates trying to complete their hospital training placements. The records will say that they did their required time, but they will not have the clinical experience. They will not be able to say, 'I've done 20 gallbladder operations under supervision so I'm confident I can do this operation.'

It is urgent that we get our health system out of its COVID-19 coma and back to work, but the Treasurer and the health minister seem oblivious. Therefore, I must assume that they are still holding the health and hospital services to the Treasurer's cuts—sorry, I correct that again; the Treasury's efficiency dividends. I have no hope of the Treasurer even answering this up-front given there is such a lack of transparency from this government. Despite the Clerk of the Parliament providing written advice that ministers must answer questions about any departmental budget matters, we still saw committee chairs acting as protectors for ministers. We still saw hiding and dodging.

The LNP has a policy to create a parliamentary budget office to try and bring some transparency to Queensland's budget process. Here we are debating this Appropriation Bill (No. 2) and we do not really know why some departments get top-up funding and some do not. We do not know how Labor chooses its priorities, only that its priorities do not seem to align with all of the problems in Queensland. The Treasurer has announced a future fund for social housing and building hospitals, but it is based on fairytale valuations of other assets which he is selling himself. Not a single real dollar is involved.

So how long will we wait for work to start on my area's big-ticket item, the Blackwater Hospital campus upgrade? I am talking about a hospital that was built back in the 1960s under Utah when it operated the mines in Queensland. Blackwater has a population of over 5,000 and it has a hospital that probably would not cater for 100 people. Once we add the fly-in fly-outs and the drive-in drive-outs, the population of Blackwater expands to 12,000 people and yet the hospital is not sufficient. I ask the health minister and the Treasurer: where is the funding for the Blackwater Hospital that was promised in the last budget? We cannot find it. We cannot see it. The people of Blackwater need to have their hospital upgraded urgently. Blackwater is a region which provides billions and billions of dollars in economic generating activity for Queensland. Given the royalties that this government gets from coal out of the Bowen Basin and the Blackwater area, they deserve to have a proper hospital.

I say to those opposite: go to Blackwater and look at the hospital and then have a look at what Blackwater does for this economy to see if they deserve a better hospital. They do deserve a better hospital, so I call on the Minister for Health, the Treasurer and the Premier to please give us the funds that they promised to start construction on the Blackwater Hospital. It is imperative that we have that hospital started and I will continue to campaign, I will continue to lobby and I will continue to speak very loudly about this to make sure that the people of Blackwater get the hospital that they deserve. The same design for the hospital that was built in Blackall could easily be built in Blackwater. It will not cost a lot of money, but it will save lives, it will give confidence to the region and the people of Blackwater deserve it.