




Speech By
Jim McDonald

MEMBER FOR LOCKYER

Record of Proceedings, 16 June 2023

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr McDONALD** (Lockyer—LNP) (2.04 pm): It is a privilege for me to rise and speak on the budget. I will start by talking about some of the local projects, opportunities and wins that we have had and then I will talk about why we probably did not get more that we deserved. Finally, I will talk about what this government has done to let Queenslanders down.

Starting with local issues, in the education space we were very pleased to see a couple of schools, the Lockyer District High School and the Lowood State School, both receiving near on \$800,000 for upgrades to facilities there: D block in the case of the Lockyer high school and block P and the OLA at the Lowood State School. There is \$1.38 million for maintenance and minor works for our schools. That is an increase of \$200,000 from last year, so I appreciate those few things.

We had a couple of other wins, including the Lowood pool upgrade and car park there—a \$690,000 build—and \$3.2 million for the Brisbane Valley Highway. Both of those are reannouncements that happened over the last couple of years. In the case of the Brisbane Valley Highway, I was pleased that my colleague the member for Nanango, Deb Frecklington, and I were able to get \$14.4 million for the Brisbane Valley Highway. This is another one of the road safety improvements we have seen there. We do have \$341 million for the next stage of the South Queensland Correctional Centre at Gatton. That is a much needed facility for the criminal justice system. As I have been saying to the minister for many years now, we must make sure there is as much local procurement happening at that development as possible. We do not want to see people travelling from all over South-East Queensland and taking the riches from there. We want to see as many local jobs used on that site as we possibly can. That would be greatly appreciated.

Fortunately, we do see enough funding—and I will say ‘enough’ funding—to see our Police Service and frontline services in the Lockyer maintained to the current levels. I would love to see a few more police, and I will continue to fight for those across the Lowood, Gatton, Laidley and Helidon police stations, the Forest Hill Stock Squad, the Criminal Investigation Branch and the Child Protection Investigation Unit. Of course the nurses at the Gatton and Laidley hospitals will be looked after as well as our fires and SES. There is sufficient money in the budget for each of those services, so that is a good thing.

In terms of the good things that the government has done in this budget, I share the Leader of the Opposition’s comments that the free kindy opportunity of \$4,600 and power rebate of \$500 for families increasing to up to \$1,000 for some of the disadvantaged in our community are great initiatives, but do not be hoodwinked. The \$500 and \$1,000 rebates are the people’s money who have paid for the electricity; it is just being given back by the government. It is just the same as the \$175 per household the government gave back in the rebate. It was very welcome, but it was part of the \$780 profit per household across Queensland. I wonder just how much profit is being made from those electricity generators to give \$500 back. I think it might be about \$1,000 per household so perhaps that could be increased.

The reason I say it could be increased is that, as the Treasurer proudly boasted, the \$12 billion surplus this budget delivers says very clearly that this government is not listening to Queenslanders. When you are in the middle of all manner of crises, including health, housing, youth crime and cost-of-living, it is just crazy to boast about surpluses. It says to me that you are taking more from the community than you need to.

I am suggesting very strongly that there are other measures the government could take. I have spent 16 years in local government and every time a budget comes around, including the six budgets I have now seen in this place, I have always begged to differ when people brag about surpluses while people are doing it tough. It says to me that this government is not listening to Queenslanders. If they were listening to Queenslanders, they would certainly be paying down debt or introducing other cost-of-living measures for people. I mentioned before the power issues, but there are many other costs that the government passes on to Queenslanders.

I mentioned the cost-of-living crisis but I will also look at the youth crime crisis. There is a \$12 billion surplus, and I will just talk about that for the community out there who do not understand these numbers because they are very large numbers. There was \$3.2 billion for the Police Service last year and that has increased to \$3.6 billion this year—that is to run the complete service across the state—and here we are talking about a surplus of \$12 billion. It is astounding. The coal royalties and the price of coal have contributed greatly to that. I welcome some of the services that are being delivered across the state by those royalties, but the government are not listening to Queenslanders and they are not putting controls in place to stop these costs from escalating. Power is one of those costs. It has increased by 32 per cent and we are told it is going to increase by another 21 per cent this year. We need to see those measures employed so that Queenslanders can get the benefit.

I want to touch on the youth crime crisis, the health crisis and the housing crisis collectively. This is really an indicator that we have a government in chaos, a government that does not understand and a government that is not listening to Queenslanders. The government is more worried about its own internal affairs than it is about Queenslanders.

Let us look at the youth crime crisis. We need to see resources and laws provided for the Police Service as well as cross-government arrangements with youth justice, child safety and education with some early interventions that can happen across education. I remember speaking to the former principal of the Laidley school, Chris Muir, when I was the officer in charge of police at Laidley. I said to him, 'Can you tell me who your 10- and 11-year-olds are who are turning into my 15- and 16-year-old problems?' He said, 'Jim, I can do better than that. I can tell you the five- and six-year-olds who are going to be your 15- and 16-year-old problems.'

Those kids in the schools are an enormous handful in terms of the behavioural management aspects of teaching. They distract the teacher from their contributions with other youth and they are a big drain in terms of resources. I suggest very strongly that a future LNP government will look in greater detail at this. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition wrote to the Auditor-General and asked for a review of those early intervention programs so we can see what is working and what is not and then replicate what is working across the state because there are some good things happening. From my own learnings in Laidley, I know there is a great program occurring between the Hatton Vale State School and the Laidley District State School called Together 4341. They are doing great work with the youngsters, and I have mentioned that in this House before.

I turn quickly to the health crisis. I have listened intently when the new health minister has been talking about delivering extra beds. That is great to see extra beds, but it was only 12 months ago that the AMAQ were saying that we needed 1,500 extra beds now. We are playing catch-up with those beds and it will be another couple of years before we see those 1,500 beds and those problems in the health system stop.

The government have been boasting about this big spend across the state. The health issue is one area where it is a hoax—in that 95 per cent of the funding for the projects are actually going to be delivered after the next election in October 2024. That is a real concern to me. It is okay to make announcements, but they have to be within reach of the Queensland community so they actually believe the government. That is one of the government's failures in this budget—that they are not able to bring Queenslanders on the journey.

I also mention the housing crisis. We have all heard about the \$2 billion housing fund but it has delivered very little in terms of additional social housing support for Queenslanders. We have 50,000-odd people on the wait list, which has grown by 20,000 over the last couple of years. Those people are doing it tough. Having spoken to my colleagues in parliament from this side—and I am sure those in the government ranks are seeing the same thing—we have been seeing people coming to the electorate office over the last few months complaining about being moved from housing and not being

able to get rental properties. There is enormous pressure in that space. I am told by a local real estate that the rental pool in the Lockyer is down to as low as 0.4 per cent. There is just no stock available for people to be able to make use of those properties.

I have mentioned the \$12 billion surplus. One other aspect we have heard through our State Development and Regional Industries Committee is the blowout in the cost of projects. Why is that important? It means there will be less money available to deliver on the roads, infrastructure and other services in our community. The Auditor-General in report No. 16 of I think 2021 examined \$52 billion worth of infrastructure projects and said that the lack of planning and the lack of control saw increases in those projects of between 11 per cent and 21 per cent, which equated to \$6 billion to \$8 billion. They are very worthwhile projects, but as I said in Wednesday's debate there is a lack of control regarding the project management of these projects and they are not being delivered on time and on budget. That is a real concern for my community.

We want to see money spent on the Warrego Highway with a grade-separated interchange at Glenore Grove. I know the minister has said to us that it is a five-year horizon. Well, this is one year down and I would love to see it in the forward estimates and start to see some rubber hit the road. I look forward to fighting with the state government to see additional funding from the federal government to see that \$120 million overpass at Glenore Grove, which is what I am told it will cost. That will stop the crashes as well as deliver a clear route to Toowoomba when it is flooded. It is embarrassing that we have a major highway and major freight route but as soon as there is a flood—albeit a major flood, which happens about 10 years on average—that road is cut. That stops the freight through to the west and north and south because it is the major freight route. It is not just the Warrego Highway where we want to see additional funding. If the waste was stopped and redirected to all of these areas, we would be in a better position in the Lockyer and Somerset regional council areas.

I mentioned the Warrego Highway. We are fighting to see the Summerholm Road interchange upgraded to see a deceleration lane from the eastbound traffic down to the south. There is a spot there that only two or three cars can use at the moment, so very often there are cars staged into the fast lane. We also want to see money for the Laidley Plainland Road and the Forest Hill Fernvale Road. These major roads through our community need to be upgraded, as well as the Gatton Helidon Road and the Mulgowie Road. I recognise that the Lockyer and Somerset regional councils are doing a lot of work in the flood space, and that is a great thing, but we need additional funds from this government. I know an LNP government will deliver those things for our community.

I turn to the other issues we need in my community. There are 36 schools in our community. There are two schools that have had some upgrades and there were only three last year. We have a growing community with the population out to the west and there is enormous pressure on our community and our schools.

I also want to place on record my concern about these announcements of hydro schemes across the state. They are great projects, hydro projects, but when you are talking about \$16 billion of a jobs plan and there is none being allocated for those projects over the next few years, again, it is a hydro hoax, not to mention the lack of money being funded to local government. We have seen funding for Queensland jobs cut from \$120 million to \$88 million, down \$42 million. That is 47,000 workers that local government have had to deliver for. It is not good enough by this Queensland government. Queenslanders deserve better.