




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 16 June 2023

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

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (3.22 pm): I start by saying that everything has become about announcements with this Labor government. Sometimes they are made on multiple occasions, yet still nothing is delivered. I will give an example. In 2020 an explosion at the Grosvenor mine left six miners horrifically injured and five jets were required to medivac them out of the Moranbah Airport. Much was made of the heroic efforts of the doctors, the nurses and everybody else involved, including the first responders, at the Moranbah Hospital. They triaged and stabilised the injured so that they could be safely taken by air. It was lucky that Moranbah Airport could accommodate five jets to do the job.

Meanwhile, for years in Gregory we have been arguing that Blackwater needs a new hospital. The existing hospital is the original one gifted by Utah in the 1960s. As a quick Google image search will show, Blackwater does not even have an airstrip anymore. Blackwater truly is the little town that could. It produces billions of dollars worth of coal royalties from its open-cut and underground mines. It is the key hub for both rail and road transport and it supports an outstanding beef industry. Injuries in those industries have the potential to be catastrophic. Moranbah's hospital is a beacon compared to Blackwater's. As I said, there is no airstrip, let alone one from which a jet could take off.

After the Grosvenor explosion, the community made another concerted effort to rectify matters. In March 2021, I wrote to the health minister—and I will table this document—advocating for funding to upgrade the hospital. I was able to tell the minister that the planning and business cases were completed, the hospital board had signed off on it and it was supported by both the mining union and the Queensland Resources Council. That was on 15 March 2021.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 15 March 2021, from the member for Gregory, Mr Lachlan Millar MP, to the former Minister for Health and Ambulance Services, Hon. Yvette D'Ath, regarding proposed redevelopment of Blackwater Hospital [887](#).

The minister's response for the 2021-22 budget was very positive, but concerns started to mount when no action was taken. However, in April 2022 a ministerial media statement re-announced the project. I will table this document as well. Members know the old saying, 'All flash, no cash.' This was the second flash and still no cash.

Tabled paper: Email, dated 21 April 2022, from the former Minister for Health and Ambulance Services, Hon. Yvette D'Ath, to the Gregory Electorate Office, containing a media release titled 'Palaszczyk Government delivers \$104 million for 5 new rural health facilities' [888](#).

The project was to be delivered in early 2023, but we are really passed early 2023. The minister said that the new facility would be operational in early 2023. Guess what? There are not even doormats at the hospital. Not a hole has been dug. Not a spade has been taken from the back of a ute to dig a hole. Not a sod has been turned. Therefore, this week's announcement of partial funding of over \$13 million is the third flash. Will we ever see the cash? While the people of Blackwater are making a major contribution by producing the coal to pay for the Treasurer's \$89 billion Big Build, they are still waiting for a modern hospital with a new helipad.

To give members context around the people of Blackwater, it is the one area where the Labor vote is strong. It is strong. They have May Day marches. They support the Labor Party but the Labor Party does not support Blackwater. We can see that because the current hospital would not accommodate a major emergency at the mine north of Blackwater or the mine south of Blackwater. If we had a catastrophe like we saw in Moranbah, the current hospital would not cope. We do not even have an airstrip anymore to medivac injured people out. We have been calling for a hospital for well over four years. Everything has been put in front of this Labor government to build a hospital. We need that hospital and we need it urgently.

That is why the promises made by the government on Tuesday will be taken with a grain of salt. We have to ask ourselves: why would this time be any different? On the one hand, our Central Queensland coal is underwriting the whole show; on the other hand, the Labor government is promising to close all coal-fired power stations all by 2035.

Meanwhile, in having raided the earnings of those same power stations, it would seem that maintenance was not at a premium at Callide C when it blew up in August 2021. Things just get worse. Three units are now affected, a new date for a return to operations keeps getting pushed back, the overseas equity partner has gone broke and Jim Soorley has quietly slipped away from the chair of CS Energy. We were told by the minister that the problems at Callide would have no impact on electricity prices. Indeed, Minister de Brenni has committed to lowering electricity prices hundreds of times. Many voted for Labor for that exact reason. Minister de Brenni is now paying all Queenslanders a record rebate to drive down their power bills.

Coalmining families help produce record royalties for the Labor government. The Labor government uses the coal mining royalties to pay rebates so that Queenslanders can keep the lights on because Labor's mismanagement blew them up and we are all meant to applaud that as some sort of compassionate record achievement. I bet that the portion of the money that comes back as an electricity rebate to Central Queensland households will be reported as royalties flowing back to the regions.

The most recent CPI data showed Queensland's energy bills rose by 32.5 per cent in the March quarter. We have been told to expect them to go up in July, probably by more than 20 per cent. It is a difficult and serious situation. If it is difficult for serious journalists, imagine how difficult it is for the average Queenslanders to make sense of the bizarre world we now share.

In budget after budget we have been told about record health spends, yet ambulance ramping has gone from 15 per cent when the Palaszczuk Labor government was first elected to 43 per cent now. There are over 58,000 people on elective surgery waiting lists. As my constituents in Emerald will tell you, there are even more on the waiting list for specialist appointments to get to the surgery waiting list on time. When they do make it onto a surgery waiting list, one in four patients will not get their surgery within the recommended time frame. The health problems seem to go on and on. I do not have the time to touch on the emergency departments, radiology or public dental chairs but we all know about the issues there.

Another thing that we were promised in 2020 was renal dialysis for Longreach. We were promised two chairs. We are still waiting for renal dialysis for Longreach. As the previous minister for health and, I am sure, the current Minister for Health would know, there are a lot of families in the Longreach area and around the Central West who have to move away from Longreach, away from their families—they have to move to Rockhampton or Townsville—to receive renal dialysis. I even have constituents who have had to hire a caravan and live in a caravan park in Rockhampton to be able to receive their renal dialysis and have not been home for six months to be with their family. That is heartbreaking. When I hear about the so-called satellite hospitals for the Greater Brisbane area and the 11 to 14 renal dialysis chairs in each hospital—or something like that—my heart just breaks for the people of Longreach.

What about the people of Emerald in the Central Highlands? There is a population of over 35,000 people in the local Central Highlands area, yet there is no renal dialysis in Emerald. People who need renal dialysis have to jump on the Greyhound bus and travel three hours to Rockhampton, stay overnight, travel for three hours back and then do it for another two days. Sometimes they spend most of the week on a bus trying to get their renal dialysis. It is simply not good enough.

The Central Highlands, the Bowen Basin, is the heart of the mining industry. No-one can dispute that. They pay their fair share in royalties, but the agricultural industry—the biggest beef herd in Australia is in the Central Highlands—pays its fair share of taxes. It also plays a significant role in the Queensland economy when it comes to trade with our major export partners such as Japan, South Korea, China and the US, yet it receives very little in this budget.

It looks good in a brochure. These brochures look fantastic—full of colour and diagrams—but this is the issue. I will start with the outback region. There is \$1.5 million for the next financial year out of an \$8 million total spend for the refurbishment of staff accommodation, upgrades to pathology and

pharmacy services and the rectification of structural, electrical and mechanical services at the Longreach Hospital—only \$1.5 million for next year out of an \$8 million spend. Here is one on which we have been campaigning for a long time—in fact, I brought the stakeholders to Parliament House to meet with the ministers—and I see as a great project. The project is the Barcaldine Renewable Energy Zone. We have only \$3.5 million for the next financial year out of a \$7 million total spend to support the establishment of the Barcaldine Renewable Energy Zone. I support that wholeheartedly. It is a great initiative, because one of the biggest issues we have in Western Queensland is the supply of reliable electricity. How many times have we seen burnouts in local towns such as Blackall, Barcaldine, Longreach and Stonehenge? When that happens, a lot of their microwaves, toasters and electrical equipment in the kitchen basically have to be written off. We do not have reliable electricity in the Central West. I believe that projects such as the Barcaldine Renewable Energy Zone will be of great benefit. How about the government give us all of the money so we can get on with it and get it done—not \$3.5 million; let's get the \$7 million out there.

I love this one: the Capricorn Highway between Emerald and Alpha, package 2. It is about roads. My colleague the shadow minister for transport and main roads would love this. He has seen this so many times not only in Brisbane and in South-East Queensland but right throughout regional Queensland. It is supposed to be a total spend of \$45 million for strengthening and widening the pavement of the Capricorn Highway. We desperately need that for the Capricorn Highway because it is dangerous. Past Anakie and at least all the way to the Belyando River, it is a road that is extremely dangerous. Obviously, grey nomad holidaymakers use it. B-triples that support the beef industry use that road. How much will the government spend to strengthen and widen the pavement on the Capricorn Highway even though it promised \$45 million? It will spend only \$2.5 million. I think we would probably get about one, two, or three kilometres for that. All we get is \$2.5 million.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lister): Order, members! Those members who are not in their seats will refrain from interjecting.

Mr MILLAR: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Here is another example of throwing some crumbs to the income-generating areas of the Central Highlands, where most of the money is coming from to pay for this budget. This is a classic example of where we are not accounted for at the moment. I refer to the Springsure Aquatic Centre renewal and upgrade. The pool will cost \$5 million. We have been given \$1 million. I do not think we will even dig the hole for that. We are given \$1 million out of a total \$5 million spend.

Here is something that is concerning and is desperately needed. Let us talk about the Woorabinda Multipurpose Health Service. It is desperately need in Woorabinda. They work hard to try to get anything. It is a good community that needs the support of the government. In terms of the promise of a total spend of \$17.2 million for the replacement of the existing facility to deliver a new accommodation building and an additional 10 beds for the Woorabinda Multihealth Health Service, all we will get next financial year is \$9.8 million. It seems that we are just getting crumbs of money. It will eventually get completed—maybe in four, five or six years. We are not quite sure. We will have to start again.

Of course, it would be remiss of me not to talk about agriculture and the passion that all of us on this side have for agriculture. At a time when our valuable beef industry is on tenterhooks when it comes to the ability of Labor agriculture ministers at a federal and state level to keep foot-and-mouth disease from crossing into Queensland from our nearest neighbours—and do not forget lumpy skin disease, which is very concerning—funding from the department of agriculture has been cut when CPI is taken into account. Biosecurity facilities and biosecurity funding have been cut.

An opposition member: Fire ants?

Mr MILLAR: Of course, I am concerned about the south-east when it comes to fire ants. If we start to see fire ants get towards the coast it could have a big impact. It is a major tourism economic provider for us. We need to get on top of that.

Finally—and this only happened a couple of weeks ago—I said to a journalist on 4LG who asked what I think about the Longreach Pastoral College, 'The sad thing is I am not surprised that it happened this way.' Here we have an asset which was built in the mid-sixties by pioneering families and entrepreneurs in Longreach, educating our next generation of agricultural workforce. Minister Furner locked the gates and shut it down. A significant agricultural training facility in Queensland was shut down. We thought there was some hope when the minister said, 'We are putting it up for sale and hopefully someone can come along and buy it.' What happened? He sold it for \$12.4 million and there is no clear pathway for training at the Longreach Pastoral College. The government has not shown any interest in providing training for Western Queensland.