




Speech By
Robert Skelton

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

Record of Proceedings, 16 June 2023

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

 **Mr SKELTON** (Nicklin—ALP) (3.11 pm): I rise in support of the Appropriation Bill 2023. These are important measures that address the cost-of-living pressures that are affecting all Queensland households. I would like to thank the Treasurer and cabinet and the department for all their hard work in providing this budget that touches on the things that mean real change for Queenslanders. The Palaszczuk government is serious about addressing the national cost-of-living pressures for all Queenslanders. In the last election we campaigned on the promise that we would be a government for everyone. That is why I am proud to say that as part of the Palaszczuk government's 2023 budget we are announcing the biggest electricity support package in the entire country. Each and every Queensland household will be receiving \$550 off their electricity bills. Elderly and the most vulnerable Queenslanders will get extra relief: up to \$1,072 per household, including a rebate partly funded by our new Labor Commonwealth government.

Education is another big winner in this budget. Research has shown us that early childhood education is a crucial part of a child's development, offering lifelong benefits and encouraging a love of learning. We know that kindy leads to much better long-term outcomes for children. That is why, in an historic step for early childhood education in Queensland, we have moved to make kindy free for Queensland families. Any child who is eligible and attends a government approved kindy will be able to do so for free from 1 January next year. This is a momentous occasion for Queensland families. Besides Victoria earlier this year, we are the only other state in the country offering free kindy for families. It is just part of our record \$17.8 billion education spend: \$2.1 billion in infrastructure for Queensland schools in this financial year alone; \$48.3 million for teacher housing in rural and remote areas; and an extra \$29 million for playgrounds and tuckshop upgrade programs.

We have implemented other cost-of-living measures to support households and businesses: over \$500 million per annum to continue uniform tariffs so that Queenslanders living in regional areas pay similar prices for their electricity as people living in South-East Queensland—we can only do that with publicly owned electricity generators; \$35 million over three years for small- to medium-sized businesses to support them to reduce their bills; while \$6.2 million will be for ongoing regional support. The budget also sets aside \$5 million to provide Queensland farmers with relief from the charges for pumping water during periods of drought.

From the opposition we had a serious bunch of whining. Indeed, the Leader of the Opposition opened his budget reply yesterday remarking that looking after each other in times of need is the Queensland way. While that is certainly true, we know that supporting our most vulnerable certainly is not the LNP way. We on this side of the House are the party of hope and aspiration. We understand how important it is to keep our assets in public hands.

The progressive coal royalties our government has enacted has led to the biggest infrastructure investment in the history of our great state. There will be many Queenslanders, particularly among our most vulnerable, who will benefit from this. The contributions from the members opposite and the

complete lack of details on how they will fund any of their plans or how it has been costed are shambolic at best. The scurrilous personal attacks on the government and the denigration of our Public Service are a great shame. The fact that they are led by those who see themselves as leaders is even worse.

This debate and the one preceding it has shown that the LNP has not changed its ways. They continually punch down on the most vulnerable. They are nothing but ill-informed and ignorant bullies. Queensland and the Sunshine Coast deserve sensible, compassionate and responsible government, not the ranting vitriol and fictitious plans delivered by their LNP members. I will continue to advocate in the best interests of my region and all Queenslanders without regressing to the gutter politics pursued by others. This is the way. Mr Acting Speaker has reviewed and approved my speech on the budget for incorporation and, as such, I ask that the remainder of my speech be incorporated into the *Record of Proceedings*.

The speech read as follows—

Housing

Right across the country—and the world—we're seeing housing pressures having a serious impact. Unfortunately, Queensland is no exception to this. That's why the Palaszczuk Government is taking serious and ambitious action on housing in Queensland. We've made record-breaking investments in social and affordable housing. This includes:

- \$322 million into QuickStarts Qld, as part of the Queensland Housing Investment Growth Initiative, which will build an additional 500 social housing homes.
- \$249 million to retain and upgrade dwellings for social housing.
- \$130 million every year from the \$2bn Housing Investment Fund, which is invested in affordable and social housing.

The Housing Investment Fund is of particular note here, as our colleagues in Canberra are currently trying to pass the Housing Australia Future Fund—effectively a federal iteration of Queensland's Housing Investment Fund. It is self-evident that the arguments being put forward by the federal colleagues of the member for South Brisbane and the member for Maiwar are completely without merit, and only exist to delay real action on housing like we have taken here in Queensland. I implore you both, with respect, to lobby your federal colleagues to change their tune on this. To stop playing politics and start getting houses on the ground, now. The delay in the HAFF means a delay in more homes that we could be building for Queenslanders right now.

We've all seen how housing future funds make invaluable contributions to social and affordable housing stock. We've seen that they are an ideal way to pull funding for housing out of the election cycle. We know that the answer to housing security isn't to leave it at the mercy of the government of the day, but to set up these funds, separate from the government, with an investment mandate that means they're constantly adding to our social and affordable housing stock. It's the answer to so many of the problems we face today. I sincerely hope your peers in the Senate come around to seeing that too.

Back on the topic of the budget—we've committed a further \$128 million to improving housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, including dedicating funding to roll out the second First Nations Housing Action Plan and funding to deliver housing supply in Queensland's rural, remote, and regional communities.

We've expanded the Helping Seniors Secure Their Homes initiative, which is backed by \$30 million in funding. In my own electorate of Nicklin, we're seeing half a million dollars invested into homelessness support services, and a further \$7.9 million invested from the Housing Investment Growth Initiative, which will help it in delivering 8,365 social and affordable homes for vulnerable Queenslanders. This Budget will build on our 74,000 existing social houses—places that thousands of Queensland families already call home—with another 600 social homes under construction at this very moment. Right across the country, and indeed the world, we're seeing the effect of housing pressures. That's why this Budget locks in record spending for social and affordable housing and sees us continue our work with the private sector, community housing organisations, and financial institutions to build, buy or lease more homes for Queenslanders. Our strong economic performance, thanks in no small part to Treasurer Cameron Dick, means we can continue to build on our record investment in housing. I'm privileged to be a part of a government that takes action for the sake of Queenslanders in need.

Health

In this week's budget, the Palaszczuk Government is undertaking the largest spend on affordable and accessible health care in the history of Queensland. We've delivered a record health budget that aims to reduce ambulance ramping, ease pressure on emergency departments, and reduce surgical and specialist wait times.

The 2023-24 State Budget also invests in women's healthcare and mental health services, noting that for the first time in Queensland's history, we have a Minister for Mental Health. This represents our commitment to a modernised health care system that recognises the ever-evolving nature of public health challenges.

Queensland Health will receive \$24.2 billion, a 9.6 per cent increase compared with last year's health budget. We've committed \$764 million of that to reducing ambulance ramping and improving access to emergency departments. We're investing \$224 million into clearing up surgery and specialist clinic backlogs, including continuing the planned care recovery initiative created during the pandemic. A \$34.8 million boost to women's healthcare to continue the Growing Deadly Families Strategy, expansion of outreach obstetrics and gynaecology services and fund the development of a 10-year Queensland Women's and Girls' Health Strategy.

Nambour General Hospital

The budget also sees \$7.1 million go towards the Nambour General Hospital Redevelopment in my own electorate of Nicklin. The redevelopment project has been going on since 2019, and despite the obstacles we've faced thanks to the pandemic, and supply shortages—

- increase capacity of emergency care
- increase capacity of wards for surgical and medical patients
- include a new same day rehabilitation unit

- refurbishment of cancer care services
- a new central sterilising unit

The redevelopment has already delivered more mental health beds for patients, a new purpose-built space for renal dialysis, and a new medical imaging department, as well as a new courtyard and drop-off zone near the emergency department, and a new kitchen. Nambour General Hospital is a vital part of the local community, and this redevelopment will ensure it can serve residents for decades to come. The redevelopment means additional general beds, improvements to emergency care and access to additional mental health beds. It will also deliver increased capacity in medical and surgical services and an increased volume of low acuity surgery. The hospital has continued to operate throughout the redevelopment, and it's been great to see patients already benefiting from the new renal and mental health units. This redevelopment is crucial for the future of our health services in my electorate and will enable Nambour General Hospital to support patients recovering from strokes, surgery, and a range of other conditions.

Sunshine Coast University Hospital

We've also invested \$21.6m into the Sunshine Coast University Hospital, which goes towards the continued construction of SCUH. The funding also supports the 738 beds that will be delivered at the completion of stage 3. The investment will support the Sunshine Coast Health Institute as well as the Sunshine Coast University Hospital Patient Access and Coordination Hub, facilitating care closer to patients' homes.

Other health budget highlights include:

- \$586.1 million of additional funding for a new 10-year deal for LifeFlight emergency helicopter services, and a further \$18.6 million for a new 3-bay hangar at Sunshine Coast Airport.
- \$150 million for a new mental health facility for Redland Hospital.
- \$22 million to provide a \$5,000 allowance to each final year nursing and midwifery student on placement at a rural or remote Queensland Health facility.
- \$42 million over four years to support women living in rural and regional Queensland to safely birth closer to home, reducing the need to travel to larger centres and support their health and mental well-being.
- \$70.3 million over four years to increase Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme rates by an extra \$10 per person per night for accommodation and 4c per kilometre for mileage.

Addressing the Leader of the Opposition's statements about ambulance ramping, I suggest he confer with his federal LNP counterpart and ask why his government condemned our health system to this death-by-a-thousand-cuts austerity. Both the member for Broadwater and he are part of the same State branch of the Coalition! Why not ask him why he wanted to make Australians pay out of pocket to see a doctor? The LNP's record on healthcare in this state speaks for itself. Their record federally speaks for itself. Publicly funded healthcare is one of the great immovable Labor Party contributions to this nation. To this State. It's something that the Liberal National Party will ever be able to kill, no matter how hard they might try.

Education

Research has shown us that early childhood education is a crucial part of a child's development, offering lifelong benefits and encouraging a love of learning. We know that kindy leads to much better long-term outcomes for children. That's why, in an historic step for early childhood education in Queensland, we've moved to make kindy free for Queensland families. Any child who is eligible-aged and attends a government-approved kindy will be able to do so for free from the first of January next year. This is a momentous occasion for Queensland families. Besides Victoria earlier this year, we are the only other State in the country offering free kindy for families. Free kindy is just part of our record \$17.8 billion education spend in this budget. It also includes:

- \$2.1 billion infrastructure investment for Queensland schools in 2023-24 alone
- \$48.3 million for teacher housing in rural and remote areas
- Extra \$29 million for playgrounds and tuckshops upgrade program

Crime

The 2023-24 State Government's record \$3.281 billion operating budget for the Queensland Police Service will fund key initiatives to support community safety. Our record police budget will also progress a \$101.6 million investment in youth justice, boosting police resources to tackle youth crime. We've included funding for extreme high visibility police patrols, a new specialist youth crime rapid response squad, Youth Co-responder Teams, additional early action groups and Police Liaison Officer high visibility proactive patrols.

A new key focus of driving early intervention youth initiatives is the announcement of a \$50 million program over two years to build additional Queensland Police-Citizens Youth Clubs (PCYC) in priority locations. A major investment in police recruiting has already been announced with \$87.5 million committed to drive a range of new police recruitment strategies over the next five years. As part of the further enhancement of frontline response capabilities, the government is providing additional funding of \$27 million in 2023-24 to continue the commitment to establish an integrated volunteer marine rescue service to ensure a sustainable model to enhance the marine rescue volunteer capability for on-water safety across Queensland. There is \$7.3 million for the Marine Rescue Queensland vessel replacement program. And the government is providing increased funding of \$16.5 million in 2023-24 to progress the transfer of Disaster Management functions to the QPS as part of the government's commitment from the Independent Review of Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. This forms part of the government's total funding package of up to \$578 million to enhance emergency services capability in Queensland.

In my own electorate, this means \$4.9 million into the replacement police facility in Cooroy. This is on top of prior delivered commitments such as the new \$8.3 million police facility in Nambour, which was opened almost a year ago. Our Queensland Police officers are world class, so this record budget will go a long way towards assisting police in tackling youth crime and strengthening our recruitment pipeline. I commend this bill to the House.