




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Record of Proceedings, 13 June 2024

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE
AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; STATE FINANCIAL
INSTRUCTIONS AND METWAY MERGER AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (9.58 pm): I rise to give my last speech in response to a state budget as a member of this chamber. In previous budget replies I have made it a custom to focus chiefly on the impact of the Treasurer's budgets on my electorate of Gregory. This time I am breaking with that custom. Despite Gregory covering one-quarter of Queensland's land mass, there is nothing in it for us. Apart from a little bit of money for the Longreach Police Station and the Alpha-Emerald section of the Capricorn Highway, there is not a brass razoo.

This is a budget to buy an election—a budget for the next four months, not the next four years. This is a budget for Brisbane, and the very area that this government gets its rivers of gold from—its royalties from coal and agriculture—has been forgotten. You only have to look at the Central Highlands—have a look at the map in the budget that shows where the money is being spent.

Mr McCallum: Do your constituents get the rebate?

Mr MILLAR: The Central Highlands is the powerhouse of mining and agriculture but there is not a single funding announcement for the Central Highlands—not a single funding announcement for the Central Highlands. Have a look at the map and tell me what you have given to the Central Highlands, an absolute powerhouse of this economy.

Mr McCallum: Rebates.

Mr MILLAR: The biggest cattle herd in Australia lives in the Central Highlands, delivering money for this government, and you have given them nothing—not a damn thing!

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Pause the clock.

Mr KELLY: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Greenslopes, resume your seat. Member for Gregory and member for Bundamba, there will be no arguing across the chamber. Member for Gregory, calm down. You have the call.

Ms McMillan interjected.

Mr MILLAR: Labor always likes—

Mr KELLY: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I think the member has used unparliamentary language in his contribution. I seek your guidance on whether he needs to withdraw.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Gregory, I did not hear that but if you did I ask you to withdraw.

Ms McMillan: Come on, Lachie!

Mr MILLAR: I withdraw.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Mansfield, I do not need your assistance.

Ms McMillan interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Mansfield, did you just interject again?

Ms McMillan: Yes.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: You are warned under the standing orders.

Ms McMillan: Thank you.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Mansfield, one more interjection and you will be gone.

Mr MILLAR: The shire council of the Central Highlands is one of the major economic contributors to Queensland and not one announcement has been made for that area. It is an area I have grown up in. I know the member for Mansfield has been interjecting, but that is where I come from. That has been where I have lived all my life and have been a part of. To see a shire council that has given so much to Queensland not given one funding announcement is absolutely disgraceful.

Where do you think the coal royalties are coming from? They are coming from the Central Highlands. They are coming from the member for Callide's electorate. They are coming from the member for Warrego's electorate. They are coming from the member for Burdekin's electorate. Yet we see nothing given to us. There are no important announcements for areas like the Central Highlands, like the member for Callide's electorate, like the member for Warrego's electorate. It is absolutely disgraceful.

Labor always likes a fairytale and this one has a two-deck title which is revealing in itself. In their announcement the first deck, in large type, is 'Doing what matters'. The second deck, in smaller type, is 'For Queensland'. Note that Queensland is regulated to a secondary status here. It would have been honest if it were titled 'Doing what matters for Premier Miles and Treasurer Dick'.

As the opposition leader said, as much as Labor do not want Queenslanders to judge them on their record, there is no other way to judge them. They have been in power for almost a decade. Their past actions have led to the position Queensland is in today. For all of this time they have blamed all of their issues on everyone else. They have continually blamed problems on past governments and now they demand not to be judged by the past actions of their own government. You have been in power for nearly 10 years and you come up with that statement: 'Please don't look at our last nine years.'

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Gregory, direct your comments through the chair please.

Mr MILLAR: Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, they are saying, 'Please don't look at our last nine, almost 10, years. Forget about that. We're new.'

The way Gregory has been ignored—a quarter of Queensland's land mass with some of the most productive mines and agriculture—shows that this is not a budget for Queensland. This is a budget to try to save Labor, and they hope the people will forget the last 10 years. Queenslanders are not mugs. They are smarter than the Labor Party take them for. This cynical vote-buying exercise has been underwritten by the rivers of gold paid by Gregory's coal royalties and from industries in Gregory.

I also point out that the Treasurer plays an old game when he consistently underestimates how much he will be raking in from coal royalties and then pats himself on the back when he reliably receives the whopping revenues that he was always going to receive. Another game he likes to play could be called 'Same old, same old'. This is when Labor produces a sheaf of infrastructure announcements as 'fully funded' and then reannounces them year after year. It was hard to keep a straight face when the latest glossy infrastructure announcement was ironically called the 'Big Build' because nothing seems to actually get built!

We were told the Blackwater Hospital redevelopment was fully funded over two years ago. We have lost two CEOs and a board from the Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service and they are only just starting to dig the ground. This hospital was supposed to be built by early 2024. We are now going into late 2024 and we still have not put anything in the ground. We have just dug a few holes in the ground to start the hospital. Blackwater is a major contributor to those rivers of gold, but most of the health care is operating out of the original facility built by the Utah mining company, which came in the 1960s.

The beef road corridors were fully funded but seem to have been abandoned. There is no 'Big Build' there. Take this week's closure of the Fitzroy Developmental Road. This is a major road. This road goes from Nebo all the way down to Dingo. It is a major road for mining and agriculture. It has been closed at the May Downs area. A grassfire on the weekend so badly affected the old timber bridge that the department of transport simply closed the road to all traffic from Dingo north to the May Downs Road intersection until further notice. This is a major artery for agriculture and mining in Central Queensland and it has been closed until further notice.

Thirty per cent of the students enrolled at the Dingo State School are affected by this. Not one student was able to attend school on Monday. By Tuesday a new school bus route was prescribed which involves the school bus first driving to Bluff and then using the Bluff Jellinbah Road to get to Locarno Road where students can board it for the return journey. Parents are having to drive 25 kilometres just to get to the boarding place to put them on the bus. One little girl who lives not far from the school had a 200-kilometre round trip on Tuesday under this new arrangement—a round trip of 200 kilometres to go to school! That is past Oakey, almost to Dalby, and back to Brisbane. This is absolutely not on for these kids. These kids are in prep and grades 1, 2 and 3 and they are travelling 200 kilometres to get to school!

We have an old bridge that was burnt by a bushfire and these kids have to suffer because of that. That is called lack of infrastructure spending in regional Queensland—the very place that the rivers of gold come from in coal royalties and from agriculture, yet kids have to travel 200 kilometres to get to school. How do we sit there and say this is fair? How do we sit there and say as a government that is okay? You cannot. You just have to put more effort into helping regional people. It is not that hard. They are not asking for much.

The Fitzroy Developmental Road is a key route for heavy vehicles, road trains, wide loads for mining and cattle carters. They are all now forced to use a secondary route which is not built to take them. The issue you have to understand here is that there are now wide loads, mining dump trucks and major mining infrastructure passing school kids on a school bus travelling on this road. Is there an element of risk there? I think very much. There is a major element of risk. I suppose I have had my rant. You can see I am frustrated. I am frustrated.

This is just not about regional Queensland; it is about all of Queensland. We are seeing gridlock here in the south-east corner. I do read the *Australian*. I love to read the comments from the readers. They give me a bit of a laugh. A reader commenting in the *Australian* this morning highlighted just this. Geoff wrote—

Another awful thing with this budget is the 'increased infrastructure' spend. Sadly, the increase is in spending, not the amount of new infrastructure.

He cites the Beerburrum to Beerwah rail duplication, which was fully funded when announced in 2019 by the Palaszczuk and Morrison governments. Costs have now doubled to a billion dollars and construction is yet to start. Geoff, this is the story right across the state, but you are right to point out that the sweetheart deal between Miles and the unions will ensure that construction costs and completion times are guaranteed to blow out.

The only thing this government has delivered for Queensland in nine years of government is record debt, record taxes, and housing prices that are seeing Queenslanders living in cars and tents. Yes, we have Queenslanders living in cars and tents. I grew up in Queensland where basically everybody had a house. If they were working and they were trying to get there, even if they were not working, they always had a house. This is where we have got to in Queensland. We have got to the point where people are living under bridges. People are living in parks and tents, and these people are working and cannot afford a house. What have we got to? Who are we in Queensland if that is the case? This is a major crisis.

One thing I do want to pick up on that is very concerning for me is obviously the health issue in Queensland. I have had constituents die because they could not access renal dialysis. I know many of you here know how passionate I am about getting renal dialysis in Emerald. Many more have had to move to Rockhampton and Mackay to receive critical treatment. The Emerald community has now raised the funds to install a dialysis chair, but Queensland Health is holding it up. Emerald Hospital is the hub hospital, but instead of strengthening its service delivery everyone is sent to Rockhampton even if they have no family or friends to support them. One elderly gentleman was discharged from Rockhampton Base Hospital at 3 am on a Sunday morning in his pyjamas. He had been brought to Rockhampton by ambulance in his pyjamas and had no clothes with him, no transport, and no-one knew to come and collect him. He was over 300 kilometres from his home. That is the care we are receiving.

Worst of all is the rural maternity and birthing crisis, and I acknowledge the member for Callide for his continuing advocacy on this. They are preventable healthcare deaths. This morning I was privileged to receive a copy of a letter from my constituent Rebecca Spreadborough to Premier Steven Miles. In March 2023 Rebecca suffered an obstructed labour at the Emerald Hospital. The mismanagement of the labour left her with lifelong injuries. Mismanagement of the labour and neonatal emergency care resulted in the death of her baby, Alby. Rebecca was prompted to write to Premier

Miles after watching his performance on Tuesday's question time when he responded to a question about Redcliffe Hospital and the death of Thea Flaskett. In an articulate letter she tells the Premier, a former health minister in this government, that his response completely disregarded Thea's death as if it did not matter. She points out that when the LNP raised these serious issues the government responds 'as though it is a political attack'. Rebecca said—

Have you ever considered it's the families of these innocent babies trying to raise the issue—
through the LNP—

due to the lack of action by the Labor Party? If you took genuine concern to address the issues it may not get raised at a parliamentary level.

Rebecca also said that the health minister's claim that Queensland is one of the safest places in the world to give birth is not right. Queensland has one of the highest rates of perinatal deaths in Australia, second only to the Northern Territory. Rebecca writes—

I was the subject of a horrific birthing experience and sustained permanent and lifelong injuries in addition to the death of my baby, a type of obstetric scenario that occurs ... a third world country.

This is even more serious than cost-of-living issues, and Labor's lack of action is not doing what matters for Queensland. This budget is taking us into record debt with massive interest bills that have to be paid by all of us. This budget has not delivered for regional Queensland. It has not delivered for our health system. It has not delivered for our schoolchildren in Dingo. It is not delivering, and it is a budget that is looking at the next four months, not the next four years.