




Speech By
Peter Russo

MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

Record of Proceedings, 14 June 2024

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

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (4.56 pm): It is my pleasure to rise in support of the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill 2024. I am grateful, as the member for Toohey, to speak about how this bill will strengthen the strong foundation the Miles Labor government has created not only for my community but for all Queensland. I thank Premier Miles and Treasurer Cameron Dick for their continued ongoing hard work and commitment to envision, build and maintain a vibrant, thriving Queensland. Without their leadership Queensland would not be in the sound economic position we all enjoy.

I have an incredible, culturally diverse community in Toohey. My community is amazing, and it continues to grow and flourish every year. I am now and have always been incredibly appreciative of their support. I read through the budget papers with great interest. I congratulate the Treasurer on providing a sound platform for Queensland's continued future growth. This first budget of Premier Miles focuses on doing what matters for Queenslanders and will deliver key measures to ease cost-of-living pressures for Queensland families. I believe the skill of the Miles government to respond to the needs of the community is an indicator of good, strong governance.

I know from speaking to my community that many Queenslanders are facing cost-of-living pressures. Household budgets are stretched and have at times broken due to price increases across the board. Family budgets do not have capacity left over to cover a bit more here and there. These cost-of-living rebates and reductions will be of great benefit to my community. For example, the 20 per cent reduction in vehicle registration will allow some in my community to not have to choose between buying groceries or paying the car registration. Knowing that electricity bills will be taken care of and that the government has frozen fees and charges for the year means they may be able to balance the family budget this year or at least have the pressure lessened. With the Cross River Rail infrastructure upgrades to Rocklea station almost complete, 50-cent tickets will allow people to discover the benefits of leaving the car at home and travelling on a train. Our Labor government is putting Queensland kids first though a record \$20.9 billion education budget.

A total of \$15 million has been allocated to the School and Community Food Relief Program to ensure that kids have the best chance to start each day with a full belly. I am pleased that Y-Care will receive a grant to deliver school breakfast programs to Rocklea State School, Sunnybank State High School, Coopers Plains State School and Sunnybank State School.

I was thrilled to see that the budget also allocated \$1.3 million to install a new lift and link bridge at Moorooka State School as part of the record \$20.9 billion education budget that is putting Queensland kids first. As is the case at many of the older schools in Brisbane, accessibility can be challenging and this new lift will make such a huge difference for staff and students with mobility issues. Moorooka, like every other school in my community, will also welcome the extra funding which will deliver even more resources to assist them deliver the best education for children with disabilities.

Some \$922,000 has also been allocated in the education budget for maintenance in schools across Toohey. The Health and Food Sciences Precinct at Coopers Plains has been allocated \$378,900 to replace the steriliser. Some \$250,000 has been allocated in the budget to upgrade the Sunnybank Recreation Reserve car park and toilet facilities. Energy Queensland has allocated \$25.4 million to redevelop the Rocklea depot and training facility to facilitate continued growth in apprentices in the publicly owned energy sector.

My community is very fortunate to have the QEII Hospital close by to meet their healthcare needs. To ensure this hospital can meet the needs of the community, our government has committed \$127.4 million towards a new multilevel car park. This is on top of the \$465 million to expand the QEII Hospital to construct a new clinical services building at the hospital site to deliver additional capacity, acute beds and facility support services.

Mr Deputy Speaker, my speech on the budget has been reviewed and approved for incorporation. As such, I ask that the remainder of my speech be incorporated in the *Record of Proceedings*.

The speech read as follows—

The QEII is an important asset for our community and the car park and expansion are an invaluable investment by the Miles Government that will benefit both the health of our community and our hard-working health heroes at the QEII.

I know that finding a car park is a big frustration for patients, visitors and staff and this new car park will mean accessing the hospital will be easier and with less angst.

This multi-level car park is critical for our major expansion that is currently underway to deliver a new five-level building and 112 beds. The expansion project will also deliver 1,120 construction jobs during the building phase.

I am pleased to say my electorate was included in the roll-out of the new Satellite Hospital model of healthcare and the \$65.4 million Eight Mile Plains Satellite Hospital that was opened on the 27th May 2024.

The hospital in recognition of the region's First Nations peoples, and their history, culture and identity will be co named Maroo-goodji-ba as chosen by the local Elders and Traditional Owners and means place of calm, peace, wellbeing, caring and incorporates "place of red soil" which is a cultural name for Eight Mile Plains and a fitting name for the hospital.

Whilst I was at the Satellite Hospital on the 27th May, they were taking their first patients at the Dialysis Unit. I met Eddie from Runcorn who was the very first patient to get dialysis done arriving at 6.00 am. When the doors opened at 8.30 am, there were people arriving in outpatients, to be treated for minor injuries and illness.

This satellite hospital will cater to and look after our community. People will no longer have to travel to the PA, QEII or the Logan Hospitals, they will now be able to receive treatment in Eight Mile Plains.

Another major infrastructure project that is being carried out in my community is the Coopers Plains Rail Crossing. The rail crossing has been an issue for my community for many years before I was elected, but I am pleased to be able to say our government has secured funding to remove the Boundary Road level crossing and build a new overpass.

The new overpass will mean no more stopping during busy peak travel times.

Removing the Boundary Road Level Crossing is all part of Queensland's Big Build delivering the infrastructure our growing community deserves.

This overpass will deliver:

a safer faster commute, rail reliability, reduce congestion, and a pedestrian overpass and dedicated cycle lanes.

Extensive consultation has occurred with the community and a detailed design is expected to be finished in September 2024 and work is expected to start next year.

The total investment of the project will be \$399 million.

Cross River Rail is also having a positive impact in the Toohey Electorate with upgrades almost completed on Rocklea Railway Station that will reopen in the very near future (July, August). The new features include:

- A new overpass and vertical transport system including three lifts and three switchback stairs
- Provision for accessible car parking within the existing car park
- A new enclosed bicycle storage shelter (capacity for 40)
- A new canopy on the platform to improve weather protection
- Improved access to the platforms.
- An additional (third) platform
- A new station building
- An upgrade to the platform finish

Salisbury Station works will begin in mid-2024 when Rocklea Station is completed and Moorooka Station upgrade is expected to be completed in 2026.

These are important infrastructure projects for my community, especially the improved accessibility.

I am proud to report to parliament that the Queensland Governments Gambling Benefit Fund has awarded a total of \$521,279.84 to 31 organisations (including sponsored organisations) in the electorate of Toohey in the 2023-24 period. This has been of great assistance to these communities.

Our new Premier knows that our Queensland families are feeling the pressure of rising household bills and by making multinational mining companies pay their fair share, and keeping electricity assets in public hands, the Miles Labor Government is delivering:

- electricity rebate of \$1000 for all Queensland households plus \$300 from the Albanese Government from 1 July 2024. With eligible concession card holders will be able to receive a total relief of up to \$1672 a year on their electricity bills.
- .50c travel on Translink bus, train and ferry travel from 5 August 2024 for 6 months.
- Abolishing stamp duty for first home buyers on homes up to \$700,000. This will mean a saving of up to \$17,350.
- 20% reduction in Registration fees for cars, utes, bikes and trailers. The reduced amounts will start appearing on vehicle registration notices from 5 August 2024.
- Expanding the FairPlay program to \$200 for each child in sport and recreation. Supporting families with kids who love sport to ensure kids participation isn't hindered by costs. The Miles government has removed the eligibility criteria so that all families will now be eligible for \$200 per child to cover winter and upcoming summer sports creating opportunities for all kids' to shine and excel and be the best they can be.
- Freezing all fees and charges for 2024-2025. This will mean zero increase on driver's licenses, emergency management levy, transport and hospital charges, fishing permits and many more.
- Free TAFE—The Miles Government is delivering free TAFE for Queenslanders, with programs such as nursing and apprenticeships now free. We know how important it is to make sure our next generation of workers can afford to get the skills they need to take advantage of the opportunities in our growing state.
- Free Kindy. From 1 January this year the Miles Government has delivered free Kindy for all four-year-old children in Queensland. By making Kindy free we can ensure our kids get the best start in life, and help families manage their household budget. But this is not only about creating cleverer Queenslanders for the future, stay at home parents will have the opportunity to return to the workforce and create financial security for themselves, and their children.

Teachers are one of the Miles Governments priorities and we have moved swiftly to introduce immediate responses to the recommendations of the Teacher Workforce Roundtable, held on 28 May, to attract and retain teachers to rural and remote schools.

Our Government will invest \$3 million to provide free accommodation for teachers for up to 12 months who accept roles at priority regional, rural and remote schools from the commencement of Term 3, 2024.

The Government has also doubled funding for the Rural and Remote Teacher Experience program for 2024-2025 to \$500,000.

The program gives urban Queensland state school teachers considering teaching in a rural or remote state school a 1-week experience that is organised and funded by the department through an expression of interest process. It includes an orientation with the host school, a weekend living in the community and five days replacing the host teacher in class.

Experiencing rural or remote teaching provides an invaluable opportunity to broaden teaching practices along with providing enhanced employment opportunities for teachers. Of the teachers who have participated in this program, more than half have transferred to a rural or remote location to continue their teaching career.

Small business hasn't been forgotten either with the New Miles Government's short and longer-term measures of \$250 million allocated in the budget to support the new Queensland Small Business Strategy that was launched a week ago.

This will see more than \$3 million in cash grants of up to \$20,000 launched under the latest round of the Business Boost programs. Small business customers to benefit from an \$11.218 billion package of cost-of-living relief and targeted concessions as the centrepiece of the Budget.

The Budget does what matters for Queensland small businesses and locks in significant and direct financial support with Round 4 of Business Boost now launched.

The new round of grants of up to \$20,000 will support activities such as future planning, acquisition of specialised and automated software, and planning and systems for staff management and development.

Immediate relief is on the way too with registration fees to be cut by 20 per cent on light vehicle registration discount that will start to appear on renewal notices sent to customers from 5 August 2024.

The reduction will apply to the registration fee and the traffic improvement fee for all light vehicles, regardless of purpose of use, and will also apply to trailers—utilised by mobile small businesses across Queensland.

Relief from energy bills for all Queenslanders doesn't just stop at the household either, the Budget locks in the continuation of the \$650 rebate on electricity bills for over 200,000 eligible small businesses.

Small businesses will also benefit from the expansion of Labor's Free TAFE initiative, helping to skill up Queensland Workers to fill the workforce shortages.

Our Miles Labor Government hasn't forgotten the social service sector either by providing a fair go with best practice industry conditions for procurement.

The Miles Labor Government is strengthening its partnerships with those looking after the state's most vulnerable as they face national cost-of-living pressures.

The new best practice industry conditions will provide social service providers with the appropriate contractual arrangements to ensure vulnerable Queenslanders continue to get the care they need.

These conditions include default five-year initial terms for service agreements, except where justified by specific policy or service delivery grounds; six-months' notice when contracts will cease or not be renewed; contract renewals offered within three months of the end date and prioritisation of permanent employment conditions.

As social service providers face cost of living pressures, the Deputy Premier also advised there would be an increase in indexation funding to 3.94 per cent, in line with the recommendation from the Fair Work Commission's Annual Wage Review.

The raise acknowledges the cost challenges facing organisations that provide frontline community housing, homelessness services, seniors, and domestic, family and sexual violence services.

This comes after the Miles Labor Government delivered an uplift of 20 per cent funding for specialist homelessness services while an independent review of Queensland's homelessness response is undertaken.

I have people with disabilities in my electorate who rely on using taxis every day to get them around. It is vitally important that wheelchair accessible taxis are available to assist the disabled to carry out the everyday tasks that we able bodied people take for granted.

I commend Premier Miles for acknowledging the importance of this transportation by having \$7.5 million included in the state budget for four years from 2024-25 to make it easier for Queenslanders with disabilities to travel in taxis beyond the end of the decade.

The budget includes an increase in the Lift Payment, which is paid directly to taxi drivers who complete wheelchair jobs for members of the Taxi Subsidy Scheme (TSS). A further \$1.8 million ongoing will be included to sustain the increased Lift Payment from 2028-29.

The Miles Government's \$21 million Wheelchair Accessible Taxi (WAT) Grant Scheme will be extended for another year until the end of June 2025.

Applications for the WAT Grant Scheme have also received a boost with the maximum funding amount per application being lifted from \$45,000 to \$55,000.

I believe this 2024 budget will deliver on the Miles Labor Government's commitment to the people of Queensland.