




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (11.47 am): I rise to make a contribution to the cognate debate in respect of the appropriation bills for the fiscal year 2024-25. Earlier this week we heard the Treasurer talk about doing what matters. Frankly, this budget would have been more aptly named 'doing whatever you need to do to survive the next election'. While I am sure many Queenslanders will welcome some of the cost-of-living relief measures touted by the Treasurer, I am also sure that most Queenslanders will see them for what they are—a last-minute desperate bid to secure votes on 26 October.

Last year we heard the Treasurer proudly proclaim a \$12 billion surplus. Sadly, today we find ourselves facing years of deficit budgets, escalating debt and a 10-year-old Labor government that has, quite frankly, run out of ideas. We have heard so much said these past few years about unprecedented growth, unanticipated growth and a post-COVID population surge as if all of it was unexpected. Once and for all, I remind all members in the House that each year Queensland Treasury publishes updated population forecasts showing low, median and high predictions for the purposes of planning. This data is provided by Treasury so that all government departments and all local governments have reliable information for the purposes of services and infrastructure planning. It might surprise many in this House that our current population is pretty much as predicted by Treasury some 10 years ago, so the excuse that all of this increased housing demand and service demand was not anticipated is simply that—an excuse.

Several decades ago it was common practice for the government to develop and build what was referred to as worker or public housing. As one of the first students at Keebra Park State High School on the Gold Coast, I watched as the surrounding area was cleared for one such development by the Bjelke-Petersen government of the 1970s. Earlier today Minister Scanlon said that the opposition has an ideological problem with public housing. The minister needs to check the history books. In August 1981 the then minister for housing released a media release regarding a housing project in Southport which stated—

The Queensland Housing Commission is to undertake a \$258,000 housing project at Southport.

If only we could build that number of houses for that small amount of money these days! The media release continued—

The Minister for Works and Housing, said today that this move followed representations made by the member for Southport, Mr. Doug Jennings, to have further ... accommodation provided at Southport.

It was former Liberal Party and National Party members Peter White and Doug Jennings who stood up for the development and supply of social and worker housing in Southport and around the Gold Coast. Housing ownership in those days was encouraged and many residents who moved into the Keebra Park estate initially as social tenants were granted the opportunity to purchase their

properties with assistance from Queensland Treasury, so not a new idea. Today as I doorknock the suburb I can see evidence of how this has helped many families secure their own homes. Many of those homes are now privately owned and many remain in the hands of the Queensland housing department.

This housing crisis is not something that we did not see coming. As far back as 2006, social engagement staff and town planners at the City of Gold Coast were warning that we needed to do more to facilitate affordable housing. As a city treasurer and a member of the strategic growth management committee, I had the privilege of presiding over the establishment of the Gold Coast Housing Co., known today as Community Housing Australia. I also worked with my colleagues on drafting some of Queensland's first planning provisions and tables of development written to facilitate affordable housing projects on the Gold Coast. A few years later I had the privilege of working with then deputy premier Jeff Seeney as the assistant minister for planning when we completely reviewed the Queensland planning provisions calling for councils to include special provisions for social and affordable housing within city planning schemes and making such development as of right.

In 2014 it was the LNP government under the leadership of Tim Mander, the member for Everton, that proposed community renewal projects for Logan, Varsity and Keebra Park. These projects would have seen significant redevelopment of these suburbs, resulting in hundreds, if not thousands, of new homes being developed in partnership with not-for-profit community housing providers and the Queensland state government. Sadly, when we lost the election in 2015, then Labor Minister de Brenni, the member for Springwood, tore up the contracts in place for Logan and Keebra Park and put the projects on ice, and that is where they have stayed. Since then there has been little redevelopment and virtually no new housing stock in these, or for that matter any other, suburbs. Not only did Minister de Brenni tear up the proposals; he wasted more than \$2 million on a study orchestrated to justify his decision not to proceed with these developments in these two key locations.

In 2015, as the shadow minister for housing, I had the opportunity to ask questions of Minister de Brenni about his grand announcement to develop more social and affordable housing. Frankly, the proposal back then was like so many other proposals of this Labor government—just another shiny bauble: beautiful on the outside but hollow and empty on the inside. I share these stories to highlight the fact that Labor has had many opportunities to do what matters for Queensland this past decade but, frankly, has not done enough. Even last year when the Treasurer announced his \$12 billion surplus, all he could find in the budget for the Department of Housing, Local Government, Planning and Public Works was an additional \$100 million. Why has it taken Labor so long to address these most fundamental needs of Queenslanders?

Over this past decade we have had public hearings, inquiries, select committees and strategic plans all looking into issues of social isolation, mental health, anxiety, disability, disadvantage, homelessness, domestic violence and child protection. What have these studies and reports told us? They have told us that the key to addressing many of these issues is first and foremost the need of housing—putting a roof over people's heads. That is why I am proud today to be a member of the LNP. Today my leader, in making these announcements about securing our housing foundations, has taken the high ground from the Labor government—a Labor government that has, frankly, given up on Queenslanders.

I want to take a moment to contrast our leader with the Treasurer. On one hand we have a Treasurer who unapologetically stated that he does not care about our kids, that he does not care about saddling our kids with the huge burden of debt being racked up by this 10-year-old Labor government, and on the other hand we have a statesman—a leader—with his eye on future generations, a leader who says that we need to restore hope and opportunity, a leader who says that we need to restore the dream of owning your own home and a leader with a very well thought out and deliberate housing plan to get our kids there. We have the plan to lift Queensland from last to first on the home ownership ladder.

While we are talking about housing, I want to take a moment to reflect on the importance of supportive housing.

Mr Sullivan interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Pause the clock. Member for Stafford, was that you? Yes? You are warned under the standing orders.

Mr MOLHOEK: A decade ago, the LNP had the pleasure of opening Common Ground at South Brisbane—a supportive housing project that caters to chronically homeless and saves the state millions of dollars each year in mental health beds, ED presentations, ambulance and police officer time. I am pleased that this budget includes a commitment to develop a second Common Ground model of supported accommodation in Southport and, to give credit where it is due, I thank the minister for that commitment. I am also pleased that this budget includes a commitment to develop an additional eight

youth foyers across Queensland as an alternative to residential care for young people in an earn-or-learn supported environment, and I am pleased to hear that our leader confirmed our commitment to continuing that concept if elected. After all, it was the LNP that established the first trial site of youth foyer in Logan a decade ago and I am proud to have had the state's second youth foyer in Southport.

I now want to turn to some local issues. The Southport Police Station has been operating at below capacity for years. Previously I have revealed how understaffed this station is, and unfortunately it looks like there is still no action planned to fix this. Southport Police Station easily needs another 50 officers in order to combat the ever-increasing crime and antisocial behaviour issues in Southport and the Gold Coast CBD. Queensland is now over 1,500 police officers short of what Labor promised. This government claims that it will deliver another 900 police officers, but, looking at its track record, I am concerned that we will be waiting a long time before we see staffing at the Southport Police Station back to full capacity.

Like many parts of Queensland, youth crime is an issue in my electorate and things must change. We need the Making Queensland Safer laws proposed by the Leader of the Opposition yesterday and we need better and more early intervention for at-risk young Queenslanders. We need to support the likes of the MOB Academy in Southport. Men of Business is a gold standard example of what can be done to support young men and help them find better and more productive futures. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the great work of Marco Renai—our Queensland Australian of the Year—and his beautiful wife, Amber, who just last week announced a fundraising appeal to raise \$20 million to build special-purpose facilities in Southport to expand this incredible work.

Southport is home to some 18 schools and there is hardly a school that is not crying out for upgrades and general improvements. It is disappointing to see that there is no itemised capital investment planned for any schools in my electorate. Each year I take time to meet with the principals in my patch and I can tell the minister that I have a list of more than 40 projects that require urgent attention.

Speaking of Labor's failures, the expansion of the Gold Coast University Hospital to deliver secure mental health rehabilitation, which has been previously announced across several budgets, still will not be delivered until post 2024-25. This delay is nothing short of unacceptable. The refurbishment of the Southport Ambulance Station continues to be behind schedule. Of the \$14 million that was flagged in the budget last year, only \$494,000 has been spent in the current year and I am concerned that we continue to let this program lag, leaving staff and ambulance officers at a significant disadvantage.

Each year we hear the words 'another record health budget' and I am pleased to see that there is a plan to increase full-time equivalents at Gold Coast Health from 9,000 by a further 1,000 to just over 10,000, but I am concerned about the government's ability to deliver. The Queensland Audit Office has given us plenty of notice about looming labour shortages in health. Over the past few months I have seen firsthand the pressure and stress that many of our health workers are striving under to meet the demands of a broken system. I have seen firsthand the grit, which the Leader of the Opposition referred to, of our dedicated staff who keep the system functioning, many being asked to work double shifts on a regular basis in a system that is buckling under the health needs of our growing population.

I am proud to be the state member for Southport and proud of my community. I am proud of the many community service organisations that operate in my patch and acknowledge people like Victoria Shiel who heads up Gold Coast Community Legal Centre. They have been working out of very inadequate facilities for some time now. I want to put on the record that it is time we found the money to build them or buy them a permanent home that is safe, clean and well located. It is also about time we found the funding to provide an appropriate and permanent home for U3A Southport. For years now they have been operating out of a run-down old building in Hamilton Heights Park, a building that floods and a building without adequate facilities to cater for their members.

In closing, I want to remind the House of the question that matters, the question my leader put to the House in his budget reply speech yesterday, and it is this: after 10 years of this Labor government, have the crises in housing, cost of living, health and youth crime got better or worse and who has the right plan for Queensland's future?