




Speech By
Robert Skelton

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

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 SKELTON** (Nicklin—ALP) (9.11 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Miles Labor government's budget which is delivering what matters to Queenslanders. This budget invests \$65 million in education funding on the Sunshine Coast, more than half of which is in the Nicklin electorate. This will make sure our kids receive the quality education they deserve in a thriving, supportive environment. The budget commits \$1.795 billion to fund health services on the Sunshine Coast. Most notably, we are rolling out a record \$11 billion cost-of-living relief package—the largest in our state's history.

For Sunshine Coast health, that statistic means 800 employees, which is a massive investment in our community. Thanks to our government making foreign mining conglomerates pay their fair share, our patch of the Sunny Coast west of the Bruce is finally getting a fair share. Our budget delivers for health services on the Sunshine Coast with: 801 additional FTE staff, from just shy of 6,700 to almost 7,500 full-time workers; funding to boost medical imaging at Sunshine Coast University Hospital; and additional services following the completion of the redevelopment at the Nambour Hospital that is almost complete. I look forward to seeing the Minister for Health open the new ED. Once the facade is finished, everything will be done at Nambour. It is a magnificent \$90 million investment from our government.

Under our Better Care Together plan, \$15.44 million of the mental health levy has been awarded to the Sunshine Coast for mental health, alcohol and other drug treatment and supports in the region. I think it was the member for Glass House who mentioned End ED and the work of Mark and Gaye Forbes in regard to eating disorders. It is also fantastic that Emily Seebohm, who is their ambassador, had a child and will still compete at the Olympics. They are a magnificent group that are self-funded. It is great that the state is including them. On that, I will join with the members opposite.

There is also funding for a child and youth acute response team which will provide timely and effective treatment and care for children and adolescents who are experiencing mental health crises and suicidality. Everyone deserves access to health care, no matter where they live. This is why our new budget focuses on increasing staff, expanding home care options, improving services at key hospitals—like the massive Nambour Hospital redevelopment—and, significantly, bolstering mental health support programs.

One thing I am really intensely proud of is the trial of home birth services on the Sunshine Coast. We will be a pilot area in Queensland for home births, supported obviously by our hospitals, our nurses and midwives and the Queensland Ambulance Service. It will be fantastic. I know that it is a strange thing. My dad was actually born at home; it is pretty common thing in the UK. You call the midwife and it just happens. You have seen the show! It is a fantastic initiative by this government to allow families to have births in their own homes with their health as the top priority. Health is a top priority of ours. I

am more than happy to see that the state budget prioritising those crucial local services. This funding means more frontline health workers delivering world-class health care to Queenslanders when and where they need it most.

Cost-of-living pressures are on everyone's mind and the speakers before me have spoken at length about what the Miles Labor government is doing to improve that situation for all Queenslanders. There is not one Queenslanders who is not going to benefit from the cost-of-living measures that have been implemented by this Miles state Labor government.

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

The speech read as follows—

Many of the contributing factors to today's cost-of-living pressures are well outside the ambit of what a State Government can address. We can't stop the war in Ukraine, nor can we control the global energy market.

But it's what we can do—what we are doing—that matters to Queenslanders. And what we're doing is delivering the biggest cost-of-living budget in this nation's history.

An \$11.2 billion package of cost-of-living relief and targeted concessions, paid for by taxing the big mining companies.

Unlike those opposite, who started out saying they might support our coal royalties—but then walked that back; who started out saying they support our budget, sight unseen—but then walked that back; who won't make a concrete promise to Queenslanders—but will make promises to coal lobbyists that they can "take to the bank": our stance has always been consistent. If you want to dig up and sell Queensland's natural resources, the people of Queensland deserve to share in the profits.

It's through these coal royalties—which we've levied during a time of staggering, record profits from the resources industry—that we're able to deliver record cost-of-living relief, like our nation-leading \$1,000 energy rebates!

If you pay a power bill, from July you will get \$1,000 credited straight to your account—no application necessary!

On top of this, the Federal Government is delivering a \$300 rebate paid in quarterly instalments. That's \$1,300 off your electricity bills for the next financial year.

Eligible seniors, pensioners and concession card holders will receive an extra \$372, bringing their total energy bill relief to \$1,672! Eligible small businesses will also get a total of \$650 off their power bills.

This means most households will not have to pay any out-of-pocket cost for their electricity in the next quarter—and many will not pay another power bill until 2025.

One of the most obvious ways that we can help address the cost-of-living is by looking at State government fees and charges. Every year on July 1st, routine indexation kicks in and makes everything a little more costly. Well, not quite every year—and that's because we're freezing all government fees and charges for the next financial year! There is a notable exception to this, and that's your rego fees—because we're cutting those by 20%!

Another massive cost-of-living initiative we're funding through the Budget is our nation-leading 50c fares initiative!

From August 5, all TransLink public transport services will be slashed to 50 cents, no matter where you live or how far you travel.

I was at Nambour Station last week, chatting with people about what 50 cent fares would mean for them.

For Kevin, who has to get on the bus from Nambour to SCUH for regular medical appointments, this means hundreds of dollars back in his pocket—every month.

Now, I represent a regional electorate, with plenty of people who rely on a car to get around. We've all noticed that the roads seem a little busier, traffic a bit denser, following the pandemic.

And it's no illusion either—indeed, public transport usage still remains around 13% below pre-pandemic levels. That's why this policy is not only designed to save commuters up to hundreds of dollars per week—but also bust congestion on our roads.

Soon it'll be much easier for kids to get involved in organised sports, following our expansion of the FairPlay voucher program in the budget.

We're boosting both the value and the number of FairPlay vouchers to make sure more Queensland kids can get involved in their local sporting clubs.

These new changes mean that the vouchers will rise from \$150 to \$200, and will no longer be means-tested, making them available to all Queensland kids aged 5 to 17.

On top of this, we're also quadrupling the number of vouchers available compared to last year—with up to 200,000 up for grabs!

This is just another way we're helping families with the cost of living, all the while promoting active and healthy lifestyles for our kids.

Education

The Miles Government's budget delivers \$65m in education funding to the Sunshine Coast.

I'm proud to announce that more than half of that—\$36.3m—is going to the Nicklin Electorate!

Our Eat right, Play right, Learn well initiative is delivering new infrastructure upgrades to 8 schools in the Nicklin electorate!

Both Burnside State School and Burnside State High School will be sharing in upgrades to their tuckshops, while Chevallum, Cooroy, Yandina, and Palmwoods State Schools—along with Nambour Special School and Nambour State College—will be getting their playground equipment upgraded!

In addition to this, funding has been delivered to finalise the new \$17m Burnside State High School Performing Arts Centre, and the new \$13m hall at Yandina State School—both of which are well on-track for completion this year.

The budget has also funded more than \$1.1m in accessibility upgrades for Nambour State College, and Chevallum State School!

We've also provided more than \$10m to expand our successful school breakfast program, to make sure that our kids are going to class well-fed and ready to learn.

We've delivered a \$3m funding package to boost teacher attraction and retention—particularly in our regions.

We're also continuing with our Free Kindy initiative, which we expanded last year. This initiative opens up Kindy for some 8,000 eligible Queensland kids who weren't attending this time last year. It also puts money back into the pockets of young families, saving up to \$4,600 per year.

We've also expanded free TAFE! Removing financial barriers to tertiary education means that more people can skill themselves up and get into a career they love.

People like Sunny Coast local Michaela, who I had the privilege of meeting earlier this year, is accessing our Free TAFE to transition to a rewarding health career in our region.

After spending 35 years as a seamstress, Michaela resigned from her job last year to study full time—pursuing a Certificate IV in Mental Health under the Miles Government's Free TAFE.

Her interest was first sparked by her own lived experience with mental health care, and now Michaela has come full circle—a successful graduate, employed as a mental health support worker here on the Coast.

Michaela is one of the many thousands of people across the state signing up for TAFE, to take their part in Queensland's next golden decade of opportunity.

Free TAFE is just a part of our Queensland Skills Strategy, which is the biggest reform to our skills & training system in almost a decade.

The Sunny Coast is booming, with job growth in our region the second-fastest in the entire state. That's why we're funding 1 million training places statewide, including 70,000 more free TAFE places.

These places will be targeted to provide our region with the skilled workers we need the most—particularly in the care, nursing & construction sectors.

Free TAFE is changing lives—people who were facing homelessness, mums returning to work, and young people who haven't completed high school—have all completed free TAFE courses and come out with good, rewarding careers on the other side.

Housing

The Sunshine Coast is getting \$30.8 million out of this budget to expand and improve our social housing stock!

We're already getting on with the job of building and unlocking more homes with the help of our Housing Investment Fund—including at Yandina, where we opened 26 new social housing units in partnership with Coast2Bay, and at Nambour, where we have delivered social housing including \$1.4 million for safe and secure housing for up to 21 at-risk young people at a time—that is, supported housing.

This is in addition to securing supported temporary accommodation for women who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness, also in Nambour.

Through our Homes for Queenslanders plan we've delivered 20% funding boosts to crucial homelessness services, like Kyabra, St. Vinnies and IFYS.

I wanted to take this opportunity to address some of the lies being peddled by those opposite. The LNP are bizarrely in lockstep with the Greens on this one, complaining about the HIF not building new houses. One can only wonder why they seem hellbent on our nation leading Housing Investment Fund not giving our taxpayers the best value for money.

Everyone who's actually serious about addressing housing in this state knows that best practice is to refurbish existing social housing stock, bringing it up to standard and adding back to supply.

Now let's say, just hypothetically, you were trying to pander to the Property Council. Well one sure-fire way to do that is by insisting that only new homes are built by the HIF. I don't think I need to say anything further.

While some people in this place waste everyone's time by bringing up pointless, red herring arguments, I'm focused on making sure the Sunny Coast gets its fair share of social housing.

That's why, on top of the funding uplifts to our homelessness services, and all the housing we've built and are building around the coast, we're also buying up the properties exiting the old NRAS scheme, to make sure that people who have been relying on these subsidised rents for years can still get by.

Our budget also delivers:

- \$97.1 million in capital grants for Social and Affordable Housing on developments led by EDQ
- \$16.5 million to investigate the delivery of social and affordable housing through public-private partnerships with work on Ground Lease Delivery Model pilots underway
- \$1.1 million to support the establishment of medium scale, mixed use tenure housing projects in key growth areas.