




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) (SUPPLEMENTARY 2023-2024) BILL:
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 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (4.15 pm): On behalf of the electorate of Southern Downs I rise to make a contribution to the debate on these cognate money bills. It has been amazing to listen to members on the other side of the House protest that what we have been talking about here are not blowouts but 'unforeseen expenditures'. My honourable friend the member for Capalaba made a very pithy observation. The member for Capalaba has his feet more firmly planted on the ground than anyone I know, and when he speaks I listen. He said, 'What? The electricity bill came in and we had to pay it, did we?' That sort of irony pervades everything the Labor Party have been saying in the course of this debate.

The honourable member for Currumbin spoke about how this appropriation cements \$9 billion in overspend. We need to remember this is not the first and not even the second but the third crack that this parliament has had at appropriating sufficient funds to cover the appalling economic mismanagement by the Labor Party, who, fortunately, are no longer in government. The word 'Labor' is a byword for economic backwardness—taxes, debt and unemployment. That has real implications for the people I represent as the member for Southern Downs. Earlier my honourable friend the member for Gregory spoke in great detail about roads and infrastructure in his own electorate. I could almost carbon-copy his speech when I refer to the situation in my electorate of Southern Downs. When I see a \$6.7 billion blowout in QTRIP while, at the same time, QTRIP shows billions of dollars in underspend on maintaining roads in regional electorates like mine and the member for Gregory's, it really grates. Our roads are falling apart and there has been alarming—

Mr Field: It is Third World.

Mr LISTER: Third World, yes; I take that interjection. There has been alarming incompetence and mismanagement in spending the money that has been allocated to the roads. I have seen examples of where the government have lauded going in and spending \$20 million on a section to make it safer yet it is worse than the day before they began—and that is before it started to rain. These things are not unnoticed by the good folk of my electorate. I have sworn to faithfully and forcefully represent their concerns on these matters. My honourable friend the member for Greenslopes raised the matter of Emu Swamp Dam. I am very glad that he did because I would like to rebut a number of things.

Mr Minnikin interjected.

Mr LISTER: I have permission from the small business minister. I know that a lot of small businesses will be very happy to see that project go ahead. Emu Swamp Dam is an example of the infrastructure we are not getting because of the poor management of the economy by the Labor Party.

A government member: What is it? I haven't heard of it.

Mr LISTER: I will mention it to you one night. You must have been away the last couple of years, Minister!

When you overspend billions and billions of dollars through a combination of mismanagement and corrupt arrangements with thug unions that then preselect people to come in here and vote for what those unions want to keep the system going along, you miss out on things like dams, roads and infrastructure. What exactly is the opportunity cost in terms of infrastructure that we are facing because of the profligate spending that we are seeing and having to account for in this particular appropriation bill? I can assure the member for Greenslopes, who asks, 'When is it going to happen?' that if it happens it will not be through any help that he or the Labor government have provided.

It was in the year 2023-24 that the federal government withdrew from its budget the funding which it had put aside for Emu Swamp Dam and that was done on the advice of the Labor state government. It is an unspeakable low that a state government would turn down and advise the federal government to take money away for a project that would provide hundreds of extra jobs in my community, which would provide water security and not just for the town of Stanthorpe—which ran dry and for 18 months had to have water carted to it by a truck up the hill—but water security for the farmers and their employees who produce the food and fibre we rely on and to keep the town of Stanthorpe going. This is one virtuoso example of a lost opportunity. I will tell honourable members one thing. I know that if we have a federal government led by Peter Dutton they will put the money back on the table. I know we have a state government here that is interested in the plight of rural and regional Queenslanders and understands that water is vital to our economic needs.

I heard one of the members speaking before me talk about priorities and choices that the previous government would make. I think it was during the period of 2023-24 that the previous Labor government made the miserable decision to evict the hardworking volunteers from the Gladfield Driver Reviver, which I will confidently attest was the finest Driver Reviver in Queensland. Just like the member who spoke before me, not only did they disfranchise those hardworking volunteers who cared for their communities, they had the temerity to go in and bulldoze the site within days of them leaving to make sure they really could not go back. That is the sort of thing that the Nazis did when they moved across Eastern Europe. That was such a miserable thing to do. No doubt there would have been some type of economic imperative to say, 'We are behind by \$6.7 billion on QTRIP so we have to make these tough decisions.'

Where were the tough decisions, the right decisions, that would have arrived at infrastructure being delivered on time and within budget? We are borrowing from our grandchildren and from their grandchildren's grandchildren to fund blowouts in projects like the ones we have seen in the course of the last 12 months. If we cannot afford to build infrastructure with what we have now, how the hell are we going to manage in years to come? How are we going to be able to pay the bills, keep the lights on and build infrastructure if we have to borrow from our grandchildren now? There is nothing wrong with debt for some of the projects we have been talking about, but if the debt is applied so that you are paying triple the price of an asset and it is taking three times as long as it should be delivered, that is costing everybody.

I am delighted that we now have a mature and confident government in the Crisafulli government which understands where the money comes from, and that is not the taxes generated by politicians and public servants. We are funding things with the proceeds of the hardworking private sector in this state and they are entitled to expect that governments will live within their means, run a tight ship and not blow out money over and over again, distorting the economy, making their lives harder and at the same time generating the type of red tape and delays that make all small businesses shudder.

The amount of \$70 billion of unforeseen revenue was poured into the coffers of the previous treasurer, the member for Woodridge. Where did all the money go? Where did it all go? We do not need much to fix the roads in Southern Downs—and I am sure it is the same in Gregory—if you just manage it properly and have a properly funded forward project where roads are not only maintained but improved. Instead, we saw a river of gold frittered away and spent on thought bubbles—

Mr Dillon: CFMEU.

Mr LISTER: I take that interjection from my honourable friend the member for Gregory. Yes, it was spent on the CFMEU. That is the honest truth of it. We have seen that \$17 billion will be shaved off the cost of building things in this state by suspending BPIC. What were we getting for that? We were seeing union bosses accumulating vast funds and influence. They could then install their Labor Party politicians in this House, choose which ones would be ministers and which one would be the premier and direct them on how to run the industrial relations system in this state. In any other context that would be called corruption, and I call it corruption. That is my opinion on these things. If you had the pub test—maybe not one of the pubs that the member for McConnel was talking about the other day when she talked about the National Seniors test. She might have meant the Queen's Arms, the Prince Consort or some other cocktail bar like that. However, in a real pub like those in Goondiwindi, Allora, Warwick, Stanthorpe or—

A government member: Blackwater.

Mr LISTER: Blackwater—actually I have been to Blackwater. In those pubs she might get a very different opinion.

The Labor members opposite should not be surprised when we harp on about the profligacy, the mismanagement and the corruption which has led us to this low point in having to, for a third time in a year, appropriate additional funds for unforeseen expenditure. I believe that the current government will take time to improve our economic situation with discipline and with spending money wisely and getting the best value for every dollar so that we do not need so many of them. I can assure the members of my electorate quite confidently, as my honourable friend the member for Gregory did, that our roads under a Crisafulli LNP government will improve. They will improve in a gradual process where money is spent appropriately on proper designs and proper contracting so that the day after it rains they do not fall apart again.