




Speech By
Hon. Jeff Seeney

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Record of Proceedings, 6 June 2014

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. JW SEENEY** (Callide—LNP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning) (5.43 pm): I am very pleased to be able to make a short contribution towards the consideration of the budget bills before the House. There have been a lot of speakers who have spoken in this budget reply debate and it has been gratifying to hear the commendations that they have extended towards the Treasurer. It would be remiss of me not to add my commendations as well to the Treasurer, who has done a great job not just on this particular budget but on the financial situation that we inherited from the Labor Party—and try as they might they cannot get away from that.

Everything that our government has had to do has had to be framed within the gross failure of public administration that will forever characterise the last Labor government. In fact, those of us who have watched politics for a while would argue that it always characterises Labor governments. Labor governments always end up in a financial mess. It has been that way in Queensland but so it has been at the federal level as well. One would be hard-pressed to find an example around Australia in any state or territory where Labor governments have not left a terrible financial mess behind them. But the mess that was left here in Queensland certainly surpasses any other examples that I can think of—\$85 billion worth of debt. Never forget the figure. No Queenslanders should ever forget that figure—\$85 billion worth of debt. It is within that framework that the Treasurer has had to frame this budget as he has framed the previous budgets.

Within that framework I think one of the most gratifying things is that we have been able to increase expenditure on those important areas of health and education. The Health budget is up six per cent to a total of \$13.6 billion. Health services in Queensland I think have been one of the areas of great improvement since we came to government. One of the fundamentals of state government is to provide services in health and education, not to downplay the significance of other departments. But the Health budget is up six per cent to \$13.6 billion and there is funding for the new hospitals being built—Lady Cilento Children's Hospital and the Sunshine Coast Public University Hospital—and the redevelopment of hospitals in Cairns, Mackay, Mount Isa, Townsville and Rockhampton, and the redevelopment of a lot of smaller hospitals as well. Nearly \$10 million is being spent on Biloela Hospital in my electorate. For a local member that is probably more important than most other things, because at the end of the day we are all here to represent our local electorates.

Education is a similar story. I think the education story is untold or unrealised out there in the community in a lot of ways. But \$11.8 billion is allocated in this budget for education—up seven per cent. To have a rise in expenditure in these areas at a time of financial crisis resulting from what we inherited I think is something that we can certainly be proud of. There is \$5.4 billion allocated to Transport and Main Roads. That is a very significant amount of spending. But out of that \$5.4 billion the number that is most significant for regional Queensland is the \$321 million that is allocated to the Toowoomba range second crossing. The Toowoomba range second crossing has become an iconic project not just for the members who are most interested in it—the members from Toowoomba—but

for the members in regional Queensland. Everyone in regional Queensland, everyone in south-west Queensland and Central Queensland, have an interest in that second range crossing and are very gratified to see that expenditure in the budget.

Equally, the Bruce Highway is something that every Queenslanders has a huge interest in. There is \$768 million in this budget to upgrade the Bruce Highway. When I travel up the coast, as I do on a regular basis, I see the work happening on the Cooroy to Curra section A upgrade. It is long overdue and a huge construction task providing jobs for a whole range of people.

The program that I am most gratified to see in the budget and the one I want to thank the Treasurer most sincerely for is the Royalties for the Regions program. This is a program that in regional Queensland has already provided a huge philosophical boost far and away above the amount of money that has been involved. When we came to power we really did inherit a difficult financial situation. So it was a tough sell to put in place a new funding program. But we had committed, even before the election, to \$495 million over four years for Royalties for the Regions. It is to the Treasurer's great credit that we have been able to keep that election promise and deliver Royalties for the Regions in a way that has been embraced by regional communities right across Queensland. I look forward to working with local communities and all the local members who represent regional Queensland in ensuring that the funds that are left to be allocated from the Royalties for the Regions program continue to bring those economic growth opportunities for regional Queensland.

There are a whole range of other issues in the budget that have been well and truly covered by members in the discussion of the budget bills before the House, and I am sure they will be covered by the Treasurer in his conclusion of this debate. I am very pleased to be part of a government that has been able to deliver a budget such as this. Equally, I am very pleased that we as a government have been able to present to the people of Queensland a proposition that will repair the damage, if you like, that has been done by almost 20 years of Labor governments. This budget will set Queensland up for the future and will go a long way towards ensuring that we do have a sound financial future. The Strong Choices program that the Treasurer has quite ably conducted over the last few months and which has been included with the budget documents is a proposition that will be taken to the people of Queensland, as we said we would, to obtain a mandate for the asset sales that are part of that project.

As infrastructure minister, I am very keen to have a discussion with members in this House and with communities across Queensland about how we might best utilise the \$8.6 billion that the Treasurer has identified will be made available from that asset sales program. There is no question that, after so many years of a Labor government that neglected regional Queensland, the \$8.6 billion will certainly not be enough to rectify all of the infrastructure issues across Queensland. The share that we will be able to allocate to regional Queensland will not be enough to rectify the infrastructure deficit that exists there.

It is particularly noteworthy that the Strong Choices Investment Program that the Treasurer has put before the people of Queensland includes a Rural and Regional Roads Fund of \$1.5 billion. That is the sort of level that we are suggesting should be allocated to rural and regional roads from the \$8.6 billion that is available. It will certainly not solve the problem of rural and regional roads completely, but it will go a long way towards addressing those connectivity issues that are very important to regional communities. For people who live in country towns, the word 'infrastructure' very often just means 'roads'. It is all about being able to get to the regional centres to be able to conduct business, transport product in and out, and access health services. Roads are incredibly important, and they are important in a different way to the roads here in the south-east corner. In the south-east corner, it is about congestion and capacity; in regional areas, too often it is simply just about access. I look forward to the discussion we will have between now and September in relation to how we might make some decisions around the Strong Choices Investment Program. I encourage everybody in regional Queensland to be involved in that and put forward the suggestions they might have.

Equally, the Rural and Regional Economic Development Fund represents some great opportunities for the future, as does the Local Government Co-investment Fund. The Local Government Co-investment Fund is aimed at resolving that longstanding conflict between local governments and developers that was the subject of some legislation last night. I think local governments across Queensland can look at that number that has been put forward as the initial position in the Strong Choices Investment Program and understand that our government is serious about the Local Government Co-investment Fund. We are serious about the state playing a role in investing in catalytic infrastructure that will lead to further economic growth.

As I have indicated a number of times during this budget week here in the parliament, our government has been about economic growth. We were elected on a platform of growing the

Queensland economy. We inherited a terrible financial situation which required some very tough decisions, but along with those tough decisions that the Treasurer made, there was also a very deliberate decision to concentrate on economic growth—to grow the economy of Queensland so as to provide the jobs and business opportunities that Queenslanders need not just now but for years to come and for generations to come. Unless we grow the economy, we will stagnate, and that is the challenge that my department has taken up. We are working closely with Treasury to ensure it becomes a reality for Queenslanders.

My own electorate is very much representative of regional Queensland, and this government has been a breath of fresh air for all of the electorates in regional Queensland. I can remember sitting in this House when the former Labor government was in power, and the Labor Treasurer would bring in a budget and we would not find anything at all in it for regional Queensland—there was next to nothing. The member for Warrego and I were reflecting on this at breakfast this morning. We were lucky to get a toilet block at the local school; that was a big event for regional members under the Labor government. The amount of money that this budget allocates to regional Queensland through all of the departmental spending programs stands in stark contrast to what we saw for many years. Regional people very much understand and appreciate the difference that this government has made and will continue to make as we bring programs such as Royalties for the Regions and those other investment funds to fruition and maturity.

I conclude by congratulating the Treasurer. It has been gratifying to work with the Treasurer, the Premier and other members on the Cabinet Budget Review Committee, which is where we make the tough decisions about the budget that is before the House tonight. I remind honourable members that this budget needs to be seen from the perspective of the horrific financial situation that we inherited. When you view this budget from that perspective, you understand the great work that has been done to have it before the House. I commend it to the House.