




Speech By
Dale Last

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (8.12 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Appropriation Bill 2021. What we saw in this place on Tuesday was the Treasurer taking the approach of famed American hoaxer PT Barnum and hoping that, indeed, there is a sucker born every minute. Unfortunately for the Treasurer, those of us on this side of the House are all over this hoax, but even more unfortunate is the fact that this hoax will have a disastrous effect on each and every Queenslander, including those in the Burdekin electorate, an electorate, I might add, that has played a large part in keeping this state afloat during the COVID-19 outbreak through the resource and agricultural sectors.

The news that QTRIP spending for the coming financial year is down by 11 per cent will be no surprise to people in the Burdekin electorate which is home to one of the most dangerous stretches of the Bruce Highway in the entire state. The section of highway between Zinc Road and the AIMS turn-off has claimed far too many lives. I see the member for Mundingburra sitting on the other side of the House tonight. It used to be in his patch when he was a councillor, so he knows the section of highway very well. I would like to think that when they are having their partyroom meetings that he is up there raising the flag and calling on the minister to fund this section of highway because there is nothing in the budget to address that stretch of road which is still subject to speed restrictions.

In the western part of the electorate, we have the Peak Downs Highway or, as the locals like to call it, the Peak Downs goat track, a road that continues to claim lives and is long overdue for major upgrades. The government's commitment to the current upgrade between Cavill Road and Wuthung Road is welcomed but, frankly, it is far too little and, for some, far too late.

Again, I need to mention the Kilcummin Diamond Downs Road and others, including the Bowen Developmental Road, the May Downs Road and Clermont Alpha Road that are nothing more than dirt tracks. They are not just dangerous, they are impeding children getting to school and damaging emergency service vehicles. Yet again, nothing in this budget for those roads.

We have to understand that, for those people who live in the western parts of my electorate, these roads are arteries; these roads are all they have to get their produce out, to take their kids to school and to travel to the coast.

Mr Minnikin: Economic arteries.

Mr LAST: I take the interjection from the member for Chatsworth. They are economic arteries. The royalties and the wealth that this state takes from those areas comes out on those roads. To think that not one cent in this budget is going towards upgrading those roads is nothing short of disgraceful. The Treasurer can talk all he likes about investment in roads, but for my electorate that talk is sleight of hand at best.

Agriculture plays a key role in the Burdekin electorate. Again, all we can see in the budget for local primary producers is promises with no commitment to delivery. In Ayr, Home Hill, Clare, Gumlu and Bowen, farmers are desperate for workers due to the closure of international borders. This government talks a big game about helping, but in those towns the results speak for themselves. The 10 per cent cut in funding to DAF explains some of the hold-ups, but in the meantime, thousands of tonnes of fruit and vegetables are left to rot and Queensland families face eye-watering increases in the cost of fresh fruit and vegetables.

I do not think those opposite truly appreciate just how dire that situation is. It was only today that I was talking to a grower from the Sunshine Coast who arranged a convoy of vehicles to transport 40 workers to the Burdekin to help plant this season's produce in that area. To put that into perspective, Bowen, a major horticultural area in this state, needs 3,500 seasonal workers every year—3,500; in the Burdekin, a couple of thousand, yet still we are only bringing them in, in small numbers.

We have already heard from the opposition leader and the shadow health minister about the absolute con job that is the Hospital Building Fund and the impacts of the failure to properly fund health services in this budget will be felt in the Burdekin electorate as well. On the so-called election commitments made in the lead-up to the October state election were dialysis services in Clermont and expansions of both the Bowen and Moranbah hospitals—yes, the same hospital with a termite infestation. None of those projects are funded in this budget and is it any surprise when this government has form when it comes to delivering health services in my electorate.

In Home Hill, we have a fully equipped dialysis unit, but locals are travelling hundreds of kilometres a week for treatment because there is no funding for staff. I know that some of those patients are very elderly and to think that they have been forced to drive to Townsville and back for dialysis defies belief. Down the highway in Bowen, we have already seen a sod turning for construction of the medical imaging unit, but no mention of the project in the capital statement. All we have is conflicting completion dates and a mention in the government's marketing document but nothing in the capital statement.

I also want to highlight the unfolding disaster regarding the lack of a doctor at the Clermont Hospital. As in many rural communities, the medical superintendent at the hospital has the right of private practice through a surgery located adjacent to the hospital. In recent weeks, Queensland Health has seen fit to close this surgery which has meant local staff working there have lost their jobs. We are hearing that Queensland Health are moving to an alternative model. However, scant information has been provided to the community on how this model will work and consultation with the broader Clermont district on these changes has been abysmal. It is not good enough and it is no wonder the residents of Clermont feel like they are being treated like second-class citizens.

Education is yet another area where this government has failed to deliver in the Burdekin electorate. In Ayr less than 10 per cent of the funding needed to build the new multipurpose hall at Ayr State High School has been delivered. I sincerely hope that the Treasurer's commitment to an extra 117 teachers in the Mackay Whitsunday area is fully delivered because we certainly need them in some of the communities in my electorate. Communities like Dysart and Moranbah have significant shortages in teacher numbers. Again, there is no funding in the budget for school halls at Clermont, Collinsville and Dysart. There is no funding for the much needed upgrade to the administration block at Queens Beach State School.

Whilst I am talking about education, I certainly hope the minister has moved on the water situation at Valkyrie State School, which has made headlines in recent weeks. Valkyrie State School has no water and relies on a mining company to truck water to the school each week in a tanker. To think that we have a school in this state in the year 2021 without a water supply is unbelievable. The school community have identified a solution but the minister is dragging the chain on this issue. With each passing day the situation at that school becomes more dire.

In Ayr, the Treasurer has failed to deliver any funding for the promised upgrade at Rugby Park. They talked the big game during the election, but there is no funding. Despite the promises to junior players—yes, children—and their families, there is not one cent in the budget for that project. I ask: how much lower can one go than to deceive children?

The deception from this government does not stop there. Out in Clermont we were promised a new police station. Not only has the contribution in this budget been just over one per cent of the needed amount, the entire project has been scaled back. The allocation of \$50,000 would not even pay for a shade sail, let alone any sort of detailed planning.

Mr Ryan interjected.

Mr LAST: This minister would have us believe that \$50,000 is going to pay for the planning for a brand new police station.

Mr Ryan interjected.

Mr LAST: I am going to hold the minister to that. We will see what \$50,000 delivers for the Clermont community.

For my electorate and many others, this is a budget that is big on talk and low on delivery. It is all well and good to talk about unite and recover, but yet again there will be no unity while this government makes promises and fails to provide the funding. I find it inconceivable that this government could reduce infrastructure spending by \$4 billion at a time when rural and regional Queensland are screaming for funding. I bet there would be a lot of councils around this state that would salivate at the thought of what they could do with \$4 billion in infrastructure funding, not to mention industry groups across Queensland.

I will now address my shadow portfolio responsibilities. Once again, this budget is big on rhetoric and feel-good statements but small on delivery. For many Queenslanders, today is like too many days before it. Each day they wake up to check if their car is still in their driveway or if their house has been broken into. Each day they get more tough talk from this government on what is supposedly being done to rein in these hard core offenders.

On Wednesday this week Queenslanders woke up to the realisation that all this government has to offer when it comes to crime is more talk. In Townsville and Cairns, as just two examples, every victim of crime—and there are thousands of them—saw absolutely no commitment to tackling this issue in the budget. In fact, they woke to the news that things will get worse. The Queensland Police Service SDS is a damning indictment of this government's failure to address crime. Let me explain. It is right there in black and white that the target for total property offences for the coming financial year is actually higher than what we have seen in the current financial year.

In Kirwan, possibly the heart of the youth crime epidemic in Townsville, less than one per cent of the promised funding for the replacement police facility was delivered. Statewide we have seen the axe taken to the capital funding for the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs. Just days after it was confirmed that, unbeknown to the minister, young offenders were relocated to Townsville because of facility shortages in Mount Isa, 63 per cent of funding to that portfolio was cut. We need more facilities to address this issue. Yes, we need more boots on the ground, but thanks to this government's inability to make the tough calls, provide the legislation required and the facilities to house these young offenders, we instead get less than half the actual spend for 2020-21.

Moving onto corrective services, we see a commitment of \$8 million for double up bunk beds in high security. It would be interesting to hear from the Treasurer or the minister as to how many bunk beds that will provide because, despite the same promise being made last year and failing, we see a reduction in facility utilisation of over 35 per cent budgeted for in the coming year. Based on my calculations, achieving the facility utilisation would mean a combination of either an extra 2,000 beds or 2,000 fewer people being held in Queensland's prisons. The minister needs to explain which one it is.

Mr Ryan: Beds and cells are different.

Mr LAST: There it is. They are different. Despite there being \$8 million worth of bunks beds to address overcrowding, the Service Delivery Statement paints an horrific picture with the rate of officers assaulted by prisoners more than four times the target during 2020-21 and serious assaults of staff by prisoners only improving marginally compared to the previous year. Overcrowding in prisons is a sure-fire recipe to increase numbers of assaults on officers. Our corrective services officers have a tough job. I acknowledge them here tonight because it is not easy working in prisons and it is certainly not easy working in prisons that are suffering from overcrowding.

Moving onto fire and emergency services, we see yet more deception. This time it is aimed at the volunteers. Let us quickly look back at the targets of this budget-wide deception. We have children, the sick, victims of crime and now volunteers. We have had reviews and promises focused on those brave men and women who, when disaster strikes, answer the call for help. Regardless of whether it is out at sea or on land after a cyclone or battling a bushfire, it is those volunteers who embody the Queensland spirit.

Promises to marine rescue organisations via the Blue Water Review are unfunded despite the minister's assurance in writing that he would deliver on that promise. Today, the minister is quoted as saying that Treasury holds the funds and it is in the forward estimates. What we have is another promise that at best has been pushed into the never-never. Queenslanders know that when they face disaster—

Honourable members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bush): Pause the clock. Member for Gregory and minister, I caution you to stop quarrelling across the chamber. Otherwise I will start issuing warnings.

Mr LAST: In the meantime we have seen SES volunteer numbers plummet to the lowest level in history—a paltry 5,900 down from 17,200 in 2002.

The Burdekin electorate has only ever asked for its fair share of the pie when it comes to the annual budget. I do not think it is too much to ask for schoolchildren to be driven to school on a bitumen road or to have a reliable water supply. It is time this government governed for all of Queensland and that means funding services equitably across the board.