



Speech by

RACHEL NOLAN

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

Hansard 6 June 2003

STATE BUDGET 2003-04

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (11.23 a.m.): The Ipswich community is more positive, more energetic and has more good things going on now than it has had throughout my entire life, and that is largely as a result of economic strategies that Labor governments—the Goss Labor government and the Beattie Labor government—have undertaken since 1989. Going back 20 years or so, the state of the Ipswich economy was really pretty unwell. Our traditional industries like woollen mills and coalmining had declined. Other industries like the railway workshops did not employ as many people as they used to. It looked like, in the long term, Ipswich was going to become some kind of commuter suburb to Brisbane. If one goes to Ipswich now they will realise that that is not at all the case. Some years ago an economic strategy was developed by state Labor governments in conjunction with the Ipswich City Council to diversify the Ipswich economy, and that strategy has a number of elements. Firstly, it was decided that we were going to keep the existing state sponsored industries in Ipswich. As a result, we upgraded the Swanbank Power Station, we built the gas-fired Swanbank E and we still employ about 100 people at Swanbank. There are still about 1,000 people employed at the Redbank railway workshops and it is still one of the biggest manufacturing sites around. So we have kept our existing state sponsored industries.

Another element of the strategy of diversification was to develop a tourist industry in Ipswich. It would not be all that long ago that if someone said that we were going to attract tourists to Ipswich we would have thought that they were a bit off the planet. But now that is not the case at all. In recent years the state government has spent huge amounts of money developing tourism in Ipswich. Last year we opened the \$20 million railway workshops museum, the final funding of which was devoted in last year's state budget. A few years before that we spent \$3 million on Global Artslink and just a couple of months ago we opened the Ipswich Visitor Information Centre.

This budget really brings together the tourism strategy that we have been developing over some years, and it does that by enhancing the heart of Ipswich. Over the years we have built fantastic tourist attractions around the city. As a result of the critical mass that those state sponsored tourist facilities have created, good private tourism infrastructure has developed. The area now has enough wineries so that people can do a wine tour and hot-air ballooning. It has beautiful function centres and great B&Bs. The thing with tourism is that it needs critical mass and there needs to be a few attractions to make it worth the effort to come to the region. The state made it worth people's effort and those private tourist businesses built up around that and we now have quite a healthy tourist industry.

The difficulty is that, as a result of many years of neglect, while there is great tourism going on around Ipswich the centre of town still makes Ipswich look like a city that has the seat out of its pants. The Ipswich City Square development is extremely run down and for 100 years we have turned our back on and polluted the Bremer River. That is why this year's budget is extremely important. Through the Regional Centres Program—and I note that the Minister for Local Government is in the chamber, and I very much thank her for her efforts—this budget delivers \$3 million to revegetate and redevelop the riverbanks in the CBD of Ipswich between the town road bridge and the rail bridge—that is, on the border of my electorate and the electorate of the member for Ipswich West. At the moment the river is a bit muddy, the banks are kind of ugly and one would not take anyone there. But with this project we will develop boardwalks along the river and an amphitheatre and the river will become a place where people go. That is going to be a huge cultural change in Ipswich.

Through the \$3 million that has come from the Regional Centres Program we will also upgrade the mall in the centre of town. I have quite stridently at times suggested that the Singaporean owner of the Ipswich City Square should either spend some money redeveloping his shopping centre or he should sell it to someone who will. Sadly, that is not happening. But with this money from the state budget it is very fair to say that the state government and the Ipswich City Council are doing all in their power to redevelop to put some energy and capital into the Ipswich CBD. That will make a huge difference to the centre of our town and it will make a huge difference to the impression that tourists get when they come to Ipswich.

Since I was elected I have spoken numerous times about the potential of the Bremer River. Again, I think sometimes people have thought that that muddy creek was a strange thing to be talking about as something that had tourism potential. But a lot of things have been happening around the river. Since I was elected the EPA and the council have done some tremendous work to do an environmental audit of the river to establish where the pollutants are coming from and to really crack down on those people who are polluting our river.

Some community groups have sprung up. There is one in Meryl Street at Booval and another in Tiger Street at West Ipswich. Community groups are revegetating their sections of the river. Boral Hancock, the old Hancock sawmill in Ipswich, has just announced a project whereby it will revegetate and develop walking tracks along its substantial part of the riverbank quite close to the CBD. Together with River Heart, we will start to see a serious service focus on the Bremer River.

In time, I think that we can have walking tracks from Basin Pocket to Leichhardt. People will be able to walk all the way through the central suburbs of town along the Bremer River. We will become a river city. This budget money delivers the first substantial commitment to that cause. We will start to see it happen. That will make a tremendous difference to how people feel about Ipswich and to the impression that tourists get when they come and visit our city. This funding is important for Ipswich and it is important for the strategy of economic diversification that we have been developing over some time and that is now very much coming together.

The third element of the economic strategy for Ipswich is that we have needed a new manufacturing base. As I said earlier, our manufacturing and traditional industries were on the slide in Ipswich. We have gone from tens of thousands of people employed in mining and manufacturing to very few. It is important for Ipswich that we continue to be a manufacturing city. It is important for our economy. It is important for employment. But it is also important because that is where our soul is. We are a manufacturing city. It is important in trying to keep that sense of self and keep that sense of community that we keep making things in Ipswich. That is what we are doing.

The Department of State Development, under Minister Tom Barton, has made a real commitment to the Ipswich area in recent years. There has been some very good strategic planning for the western corridor. The department has contributed to the development of private industrial estates such as that which Jeff Cooper is creating in Don Livingstone's electorate at Tivoli, Bremer Business Park and the Swanbank Enterprise Park in which CS Energy, a government owned corporation, is absolutely central.

For some years we have been talking about new manufacturing coming to Ipswich. Now it is actually happening. Just a couple of months ago Caprol—that is the old Alcan—announced that it would be building an aluminium extrusion facility in the Bremer Business Park. That will bring between 200 and 300 permanent jobs. While some residents have expressed environmental concerns, the EPA and council have place a wide range of environmental conditions on it. I am very confident that, with good monitoring, there is no need for serious environmental concerns in the community. There will be between 200 and 300 jobs created.

What does that mean? As I said in relation to tourism, we have been talking about this for a while and now it is really seriously happening. There is a very good chance that there will soon be a big paper mill developed at the Swanbank Enterprise Park. We can see the seeds of new, clean manufacturing industries coming to Ipswich. This budget very much delivers on that strategy. It means that the government is contributing to the positive outlook that is very much starting in Ipswich.

I will now talk about some of the important social policy aspects of the budget. One thing that Labor governments do that sets us worlds apart from our conservative opponents is that we fundamentally believe in equality of opportunity. We fundamentally believe that everyone, regardless of where one comes from or how much money one has, should have access to excellent, quality health care.

Mr English: A fair go.

Ms NOLAN: Indeed, a fair go. We believe that everyone, regardless of how much money one has, should have access to a good education system. That is what sets us a world apart from our conservative opponents. Right now the Howard government is setting up a two-tier health system through the demolition of Medicare.

Ms Nelson-Carr: That only the privileged can access.

Ms NOLAN: As the member for Mundingburra says, it is setting up a system with a higher tier for the privileged who can pay their private health insurance and then get their rebate and then the second-rate system for everybody else. That is absolutely anathema to the Labor Party, and so it should be.

Over many years the Howard government has done exactly the same thing in education. We have seen the abominable rort in recent years of increases in funding to the most elite private schools at the expense of funding to state schools. Now we are seeing that two-tier approach very heavily pushed through the Brendan Nelson reforms to higher education.

This budget swims very strongly against that tide. There is an 11 per cent increase across the state in funding for health. That is being delivered in Ipswich with an \$847,000 increase in recurrent funding to the West Moreton health district and \$950,000 for new capital equipment.

The budget also delivers very strongly in the area of education. I was extremely pleased to see that there is \$100,000 for special education at Bremer State High School and \$10,000 for the unit at the Ipswich Central School. There is also significant capital works money for Blair State School, Ipswich Central State School and Bundamba State Primary School, as well as for the long-awaited re-roofing at Bremer State High School. This means that we are putting money into state education. We are putting in more teachers. We are creating healthier environments in which kids can learn.

The other element of the budget is that there is a 16 per cent increase in funding for disability services. The opposition whinges and moans consistently about there not being enough money for country racing or for its offices, but we never hear its members talking about the desperate need in the area of disability services. One of the biggest things that can change one's life is if one has a child with a disability. That can happen to any of us. When one has a child with a disability one's life is turned upside down. Certainly until the Goss government, one got very little support from the state government. As a result, many families are torn apart because the strain is too much for them bear.

The families of people with disabilities whom I deal with in Ipswich are probably the most wonderful group of people I encounter. There are some people for whom that strain is too much. The majority of people who manage to hold it together are open minded, tolerant, generous and kind, and they very much deserve our support. This budget delivers that support with a 16 per cent increase in funding across-the-board. In Ipswich \$680,000 has been allocated for the Way of the Future program, which is the development of innovative housing specifically for people with a disability.

One of the final points I want to make is that there is also a significant increase in child protection through the Department of Families. This was the No. 1 priority of last year's budget, but again there is a significant increase in funding in this year's budget. That includes in Ipswich \$356,000 for foster carers and relatives supporting children. These people again very much need our support. I am very satisfied to see significant funds flowing through for child protection.

This is a budget that delivers on priorities. It delivers on the ongoing strategy of economic diversification that means Ipswich is a stand-alone city that maintains its industries, that maintains its pride and that has not gone down the path it could so easily have gone down of merely becoming a satellite city to Brisbane. This budget delivers on the strategy which means that Ipswich still has its soul. It also delivers on the Labor Party still having its soul. It provides equitable opportunity to health and education, and it provides services to the people who most need it—that is, people with disabilities—and child protection.

I have been disappointed with the response to this budget from the opposition. For a few years now it has come in here and told us that it wants more money—for rural relief, country racing, for the opposition office—but it has no way of getting it. In the whole time I have been here, the opposition has not supported one single revenue measure. It has been happy to say that it is really quite supportive of our spending in social policy areas like disability. It is happy to come along for the ride. But it is completely unable to tell us how it would fund the massive increases in spending that it promises to people who it thinks are too stupid to know any different.

Mr English: Spend it like drunken sailors.

Ms NOLAN: They would if they had a chance. They treat people like fools by telling them that they will deliver these services but, at the same time, not supporting any revenue measures. Will they sack public servants and privatise industry? What will they do? Queenslanders are not stupid enough to believe that we can spend more money in the bush and we can prop up things like country racing but we will not find the money anywhere to do it. The 'limp balloon' brochure put out as their budget analysis is a classic example of that. They tried to compare the so-called halcyon days of the Borbidge government with those of the Beattie government. But that is a bit of an economically dodgy task to engage in. That 'limp balloon' brochure they have, for example, compared forecasts from year to year rather than actual outcomes in terms of areas like job creation. This stuff is an insult to the intelligence of Queenslanders.

The opposition might think it can put this over people and get away with it, but it is sadly mistaken. The people of Queensland are not quite as stupid as the opposition would like them to be. This is a good budget, a sound budget—a budget with soul and a budget that is economically extremely responsible. I commend it to the House.