



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

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MOTION OF CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (11.28 a.m.): I rise to speak against the motion and to support the amendment to the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. It is simply not possible to have any confidence in this so-called new Labor Government, because across the Chamber are the same faces and the same failures with, of course, the same favours owed to their union mates. The other day I was asked by a constituent of mine, "What keeps you going in politics?" I answered, "The same thing that has always kept me going: a desire to leave the place better than I found it." I think that sentiment or something close to it is what motivates most of us involved in political life.

The trouble with Labor Governments is that, although each individual Labor member may be doing his or her best to leave the place better than they found it, Labor as a whole has a sorry history of leaving States and countries a lot worse off than when they found them. Labor left Victoria an economic basket case; Labor left South Australia bankrupt; Labor left Western Australia a billion dollars worse off; and Labor left Australia a \$10 billion deficit in its last Federal Budget. True to form, Labor was well on the way to leaving Queensland deep, deep in debt.

This Labor Government—the one that those opposite would like to have confirmed today—is very lucky because it has found Queensland in a lot better condition than it was when Labor left office two and a quarter years ago. When we came to Government in early 1996 we called for an independent assessment of the State's finances. The Queensland Audit Commission report said that, if unchecked, the operating deficit in this State would blow out to \$2.7 billion by the year 2006. Let me quote from that report. It said this—

"There is an inbuilt trend on existing policies, practices and planning assumptions to further progressive deterioration in the operating position year to year. Without corrective action the State's operating result would deteriorate by around \$200m a year to reach \$2.7 billion by 2005-06."

The coalition was the corrective action for which Queensland was crying out. I believe that when the dust has settled on the crash—and by that I refer to the One Nation express train which hit the Queensland coalition Government on its way to Canberra—historians will record that the National/Liberal coalition Government from February 1996 to June 1998 was a very good Government for Queensland. It was a Government which put the brakes on Queensland becoming another Labor basket case. It was a Government which laid down the policies to make Queensland prosper in the 21st century. It was a Government which left this State better than it found it. In 28 months we doubled economic growth, we created 91,000 jobs and we increased capital works spending by 50%. In short, we left this State a lot better than we found it.

In speaking against this confidence motion I intend to cover three important areas: firstly, how Labor failed in its last term in government; secondly, how the coalition succeeded in its last term; and, thirdly, why Labor is doomed to failure in its new term in Government. Let us open Labor's scrapbook from 1989 to 1996. Perhaps it is as well to start with the Public Service Management Commission. The PSMC spread fear and loathing throughout the Public Service and totally politicised the whole process. No senior public servant could be promoted without Kevin Rudd's say-so. If one had never called someone else "comrade" one had little chance of climbing the Public Service ladder.

Let us turn some more pages of Labor's scrapbook. We come to education. In some years under Labor, while thousands of southerners were pouring into Queensland and our population was booming, teacher numbers actually went backwards. In talking of things going backwards under Labor, we must note that police numbers did not keep pace with community requirements. Under Labor, the last thing a person wanted to do in Queensland was to become ill. The honourable member for Capalaba was in charge of our health system and people had to wait a long time to get better. It was a long wait.

If I may digress for a moment while on the subject of the honourable member for Capalaba: it is interesting to note that two and a half years ago in this very same debate the honourable member told this House that the coalition "came into Government through the bathroom window protected by a silver spoon." Labor has come into Government in a pair of Wellington boots! One cannot run very fast in a pair of Wellington boots. While Mr Beattie was Health Minister and spent 100 days consulting, the consulting rooms of the surgeons just became more crowded. When the coalition came to Government it found that 49 out of every 100 patients waited longer than the recommended time for Category 1 elective surgery. Today, after a little more than two years under the National/Liberal coalition less than two patients in a hundred wait longer than the recommended time.

As I look across the Chamber, I am reminded of some other scrapbook moments from Labor's last time in Government. I remember the infamous HOME scheme initiated by Tom Burns and later presided over by the honourable member for Chatsworth. HOME was supposed to mean home ownership made easy. It turned out to be misery for thousands of Queenslanders. While the honourable member for Chatsworth was Minister for Housing the Queensland Audit Office identified no fewer than 6,900 serious accounting problems with the department's housing section. Compare this with our record. Under the good management of the coalition, that same department received a clean bill of health. It received an unqualified audit report.

I notice the honourable member for Yeronga and the honourable member for Murrumba on Labor's front bench. Both honourable members have held the portfolio of Attorney-General at some stage. However, when it comes to crime fighting, the two honourable members were not Batman and Robin, the dynamic duo. In fact, they were the dud duo! Their contribution to Labor's scrapbook was to make jail the last resort for violent criminals and to so soften the Criminal Code as to make criminals the victims.

We come to the honourable member for Ipswich. Labor would need a separate scrapbook for his koala tunnel fiasco. When Mr Hamill was at the helm, the Department of Transport was going to spend \$73m of taxpayers' money to save an endangered species. That endangered species, of course, was the four Labor members affected by the proposed eastern tollway. As if planning to put the road through a State forest was not bad enough, Labor then compounded the problem by deciding to build the road under the forest to save the koalas. The extra cost amounted to \$73m. The plan was to reforest the area above the tunnel. The only problem was that Mr Hamill's brilliant plan allowed for only 900 centimetres of topsoil to support the mature gum trees. I hope his plans for Treasury have more depth. With a scrapbook like that, it is impossible—and, I might add, immoral—to support a vote of confidence in this Government.

I come to my second point. My colleagues will discuss the achievements of the coalition in various portfolios in more detail as this debate unfolds. However, for the benefit of the many new members in this House I want to recap some of the achievements of the coalition in its short term in Government. Queensland provided more than one in every two jobs created in Australia in the 12 months leading up to the election. Just before the election, unemployment hit its lowest level in seven years. We promised to create 50,000 jobs in 12 months. We did it in just nine months. We kept Queensland as the low tax capital of Australia. Our last Budget—for which I commend the member for Caloundra, Mrs Sheldon—contained no new taxes. In fact the Budget cut existing taxes. I notice that the new Treasurer is already scrapping that Budget.

The coalition boosted spending in key areas of need. As the Leader of the Opposition indicated, all these programs were fully costed. We provided almost 2,000 more teachers, 412 more police and 374 civilians for the Police Service and an extra 1,000 staff for Queensland Health. We successfully merged Suncorp with the QIDC and Metway to give this State a big player in the financial game. We introduced wide-ranging industrial relations reforms. We introduced the toughest crime laws in Australia. Despite not having a majority, we implemented 90% of the policies that we took to the people of Queensland in July 1995. In short, we left this State in a lot better condition than that in which we found it.

I turn now to my third and final point. Why do I believe that Labor is doomed to fail in this new term? Put simply, Labor has been given Government based solely on stability, not ability. The Leader of the Opposition has already referred to the letter written by Mr Peter Beattie on Thursday, 25 June to the honourable member for Nicklin, Mr Peter Wellington. I believe that we should call this letter the "Peter principles". For those members who are not conversant with management texts, I point out that

the original meaning of "Peter principle" is that a person gets promoted to his or her level of incompetence.

Mr Hamill interjected.

Dr WATSON: I am glad that the Treasurer picked that up. In some cases the person may get promoted even further than his or her level of incompetence.

I return to the other "Peter principles". In his letter to Peter Wellington, Peter Beattie penned this little gem—

"Labor will maintain a surplus Budget framework and in each year will further reduce net debt."

I have already informed the House where we were headed under the last Labor Government, and it was not to reduce net debt any further. In fact, it was to get deeper into debt. We were headed for a Budget deficit by the year 2006 of \$2.7 billion.

Mr Fouras interjected.

Dr WATSON: What the Commission of Audit report showed quite clearly and unequivocally was that the percentage of recurrent expenditure as a percentage of total expenditure was increasing at such an alarming rate that we were going to have a deficit year after year, and that is why it was building up to 2005-2006. There was absolutely no question about that.

Mr Elder: It was a political document and devalued as such.

Dr WATSON: It was a political document. The commission was chaired by Vince FitzGerald—the very individual who was head of the Federal Department of Finance under Labor.

Mr Elder: Found to be flawed.

Dr WATSON: Come off it! Is the Deputy Premier saying that the individuals involved from the business community here were political? That is simply not true. That was shown quite clearly. If the member had gone to some of the business functions around town he would know that not only was it shown in that document in that first year but in subsequent years it was demonstrated that the coalition reversed that trend in its first Budget and did so over the next two successive Budgets. We are going to be looking to see what this Government does. At any rate, let me return to what I was saying before the Deputy Premier interjected.

After just two and a half years in Opposition, and under these new Peter principles, Labor is suddenly going to turn around and reduce debt each year. Put simply, I do not buy it. In fact, I cannot buy it. I simply cannot believe that the Socialist Left members, such as the honourable member for South Brisbane, the honourable member for Mount Gravatt or the honourable member for Cook, are suddenly going to adopt a financially responsible outlook.

Mr Elder interjected.

Dr WATSON: The member for Capalaba does not have the numbers in caucus. The Socialist Left always had one solution for any problem: throw other people's money at it. They are not going to change, and Labor is not going to change. We can have no confidence in a Government which has no concept of long-term fiscal responsibility, and we certainly cannot have confidence in a Government which undervalued its election promises by \$1.5 billion. If the way Labor costed the tilt train is any guide, we will end up with Thomas the Tank Engine.

The Commission of Audit showed clearly that, under Labor, Queensland was sailing into rough waters. By the year 2006, every baby born in Queensland would have entered this world with \$800 of public debt hanging over its head. Fortunately, the coalition came in and righted the ship. We were unfortunate that a shock wave called One Nation washed us overboard, and a new captain and crew—by default, not by design, as has already been said by the Leader of the Opposition—has taken over. We have no confidence in the new captain. We have no confidence in his crew. That is why members on this side of the House are going to vote against the motion moved by the Premier and seconded by the Deputy Premier, and that is why I have seconded the amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition.
