



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard 9 November 1999

APEC TECHNOMART

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (6.10 p.m.): I rise to second the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. The burning issue tonight is how much will this Government's gross incompetence cost the taxpayers of Queensland. This morning this Government finally conceded its ill-conceived plan to flush another \$300,000 down the toilet in the Technomart fiasco. However, the Government still will not reveal the State's total financial exposure.

Based on the Deputy Premier's admission early today, the total bill for Queensland taxpayers could well top \$500,000. The Deputy Premier has repeatedly tried to duck the issue by hiding behind Crown Law. What did the Premier say—"So!"?

Mr Beattie: I was talking to the Deputy Premier about something that is totally unrelated.

Dr WATSON: I thought the Premier said, "So!" The Deputy Premier and the Premier have repeatedly tried to duck the issue by hiding behind Crown Law. The Deputy Premier admits that the lawyers are involved but he will not disclose how much is at stake; nor will the Premier admit the figure, even though he is constantly telling us about his open and accountable Government. Taxpayers have a right to know what the total bill will be if Crown Law fails to salvage the wreck. The fact is that the Government's track record does not inspire confidence.

One does not resort to lawyers or the courts unless one is playing for very high stakes. It does not really matter whether the Government paid the money and is trying to get it back, or whether it has committed the money and is trying to withhold it. What is the State's financial exposure if the Government fails to mitigate its total disaster? That is the question.

It is a nonsense to suggest that the bottom line cannot be disclosed for legal reasons. What is the Government trying to hide? The taxpayers are entitled to know the full picture. They have the right to know about every last dollar that is flushed down the toilet. It is their money and it is their right. The Premier and the Deputy Premier are treating Queensland taxpayers with absolute contempt.

Mr Beattie: Not true.

Dr WATSON: Of course it is true. This morning we had a 15-minute statement which was pure obfuscation. The Deputy Premier did not come clean on what precisely was at stake for Queensland taxpayers. He said, "Don't worry about that." The taxpayers are entitled to worry about their own money. The Government has a moral obligation to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. All we have so far heard from the Premier and the Deputy Premier is a pack of half truths and legal mumbo jumbo. Getting information out of this mob is like extracting teeth. The Premier is constantly proclaiming his commitment to open and accountable Government, but when it comes to the crunch he folds every time.

What a difference a month makes. Four weeks ago the Premier was running around Asia and the United States trying to steal the glory for "Australia's biggest ever technology conference and expo". They are the Premier's words, not ours. Only four weeks ago he pulled on the emperor's robes and anointed himself as Queensland's superstar in relation to the Technomart. Where are those robes today?

The Premier has been exposed. The only way he can hide his embarrassment is to hide behind a lawyer's shingle. It is not even his own shingle; it belongs to someone else. He will not tell us how

much his venture capital conference cost because he has not disclosed the figures. He has not disclosed any of the other potential costs with respect to audio equipment and such things. We want to know precisely what is the situation.

The Premier will not tell us how many Government exhibitors and delegates were roped in to fill the empty seats. He will not tell us how many public servants and union officials were press-ganged into service. He will not come clean on the bottom line.

As the Leader of the Opposition said, the warning bells were ringing three months ago but the supersalesman did not hear them because he was too busy blowing his own trumpet. The Government should have known six months ago that the conference was in trouble. It knew that the conference was in trouble three months ago but it did not lift a finger.

Today, the Deputy Premier had the gall to brag about the letters of thanks which he received for burying the Technomart corpse last Wednesday. He should have been on the World Wide Web and looking at what was being said there. He should have been looking at Computer World, which said—

"Professional conference organisers said they could not remember a disaster of this magnitude and expressed astonishment that moves weren't taken to avert it."

That completely contradicts the Government's assertions.

Time expired.
