



Speech by

**Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE**

**MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE**

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Hansard 18 July 2000

### STATE BUDGET

**Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE** (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.32 a.m.): It was interesting to note the sensitivity of the Deputy Premier this morning in regard to the leaked document from his office dealing with the strategy to sell the Budget. It is very clear indeed that this is not a very happy camp. What we have had released over the last week or so are most of the details of the Budget, including the problems in the Budget and the strategy from the Government's spin doctors on how it is going to sell it.

The simple reality is that this Government is all about the spin; it is all about laughing off problems; it is all about joking its way through crises. The reality is that the Government does not want the people of Queensland, the Parliament and the media to know what is going on.

We had the extraordinary situation in the media lock-up this morning where I am reliably advised that the media had access for only a very limited time to the Budget documents before the Treasurer briefed them. We have, once again this year, the total abandonment of the convention in this place of Budget documents being made available to the Opposition parties well ahead of time. The Treasurer has now advised my office that the Opposition will not see advance copies of the documentation until 1.30 this afternoon.

If that is the way the Government wants to play the game, that is its business, but what is it hiding? It is becoming increasingly clear that this Government is using every trick in the book! Is it any wonder that people feel cynical and disconnected and betrayed by the political process when a Government puts to writing how to sell the Budget and that document, in a major embarrassment to the Government, is subsequently released?

The Deputy Premier would have us believe that he did not leak it, that his office did not leak it. We will have to assume that, for the first time since it has been in office, this Government has some new-found attachment to freedom of information.

Let us look at what this document says—a document the contents of which have been confirmed by the Premier and the Deputy Premier. The paper warns that high unemployment, departmental deficits, speculation over a funding black hole and plans to recover ambulance and fire services costs will make the big sell a difficult task. It goes on to say, "We cannot afford to hesitate simply because of what we know internally." In other words, "We know certain things, but we are not going to tell people. We are not going to tell the lock-up, we are not going to tell Parliament, we are not going to tell the media. We must not let on what we know internally." In other words, "We must not tell the truth." Deceit, deception, political dishonesty!

**Mr Springborg:** The Labor way.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** The Labor way, as the Deputy Leader of the Opposition says. In the "Hurdles" section the paper warns that the Government will come under intense scrutiny from the financial press in relation to its accrual operating surplus—

"Our response should be that you can't compare the old consolidated fund position with the new accrual accounting system."

The paper goes on to speculate, indeed suggest, that in terms of cash accounting there is a black hole of something like \$840m on top of a \$1.2 billion deficit in cash accounting terms posted by this Government last year.

**Mr Springborg:** Another Labor fiddle.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** Another Labor fiddle, as my colleague says. The Government's strategy is clear—

"We need literally to laugh off any suggestions of a Budget in trouble and definitely sell this strategy as a standard part of any strong Government's sound economic management to deliver much needed capital works and jobs to all areas of Queensland."

The paper concedes that the Government is facing criticism over the stable but unchanged level of unemployment of around 8%. Of course, a reduction in the unemployment rate was a core promise—5%, the Leader of the Labor Party said. He knows, according to this Budget paper, the accuracy of which he has confirmed, that the Budget forecasts will be in the vicinity of 8% as we head towards the next election.

Well may they laugh. Long may they laugh. May they laugh frequently. However, the financial state of Queensland, the business of the finances of the State of Queensland, is not a laughing matter. It is deadly serious. The State's finances should not be regarded as a joke.

**Mr Johnson:** The biggest business in the State.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** The biggest business in this State should not be regarded as a laughing matter and a joke. How often have we seen this Government laugh its way through when it is in trouble?

**Dr Watson:** As they did today.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** As they did today. They followed the strategy that the Treasurer says is not right, but the strategy that the Premier and the Deputy Premier say is right, they followed it to the letter. They followed it to the letter in defending this fraudulent, shoddy Budget that will be presented to the Parliament in a couple of hours' time.

I also take issue with the Treasurer about his very dodgy raid on the assets of the port authorities of this State, as first revealed by the Opposition some time ago. The assets of the Cairns Port Authority were built up over the years by people such as Mick Borzi, George Chapman and Ron Ireland. They built up the assets; they built up the Port of Cairns into the successful venture that it is today. They did not get any help—they did not get one cent—from this Treasurer or this Government. This Government made no contribution whatsoever. As a result of that very careful stewardship at Cairns, and no doubt at Gladstone and other places, funds are to be milked through the restructuring debt for equity exercise that Deutsche Bank became involved in. Isn't it interesting that this morning when mentioning his trade mission to Europe and the UK the Premier paid homage to Deutsche Bank? So he should have, because Deutsche Bank paved the way for him to fill in the black hole in his Budget that he knows has been such a massive problem.

If we believe the document that was released from the office of the Deputy Premier—the document that the Deputy Premier and the Premier say is right—in terms of cash accounting there will be a deficit this time round. It is all very well for this most discredited of Treasurers to laugh his way through it, to admit and to say, "We must not let on what we know internally." The reality is that the people of Queensland know something else.

The people of Queensland know about the fumbled attempt to introduce a State fuel tax. They know about the raids in respect of the electricity generators of 95%. They know about the raids on port authorities. They know why water is being corporatised. They know that the leader of this increasingly discredited Government promised Queenslanders a 5% unemployment rate. According to the leaked material from the Deputy Premier's office, the Treasurer has a document that will be talking about an 8% unemployment rate. The Deputy Premier talks about our record. We posted 5% economic growth in this State. This Government cannot post 4%.

**Mr ELDER:** I rise to a point of order. The remark is untrue. I want it withdrawn. It is the same remark. It was not leaked from my office.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** What remark does the Deputy Premier want withdrawn?

**Mr ELDER:** The Leader of the Opposition knows what it was. It was not leaked from my office. I have hit him four times today. He should just withdraw it.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** I made a number of remarks. What remark does the Deputy Premier want withdrawn?

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Fouras): Order! If the member allowed us to hear the point of order, he would know what the remark was.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I cannot withdraw—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I ask you to withdraw the comments.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** Withdraw what?

**Mr ELDER:** On five occasions this morning the Leader of the Opposition has alleged that it was leaked from my office. I have taken five points of order. I want it withdrawn.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** I can only assume that it was leaked from the Treasurer's office, or maybe it was leaked from the Premier's office.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I am on my feet. The Leader of the Opposition talked right through a point of order. He talked right through my asking that he withdraw. I ask the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw and then resume his seat.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I note the sensitivity of the Deputy Premier and I withdraw. I do not believe him.

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