



Speech by

Hon. J. FOURAS

MEMBER FOR ASHGROVE

Hansard 26 November 2002

**APPROPRIATION BILL [No. 2]
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Hon. J. FOURAS (Ashgrove—ALP) (2.40 p.m.): I am pleased to take part in this debate. This is legislation we debate at this time every year. It is fascinating, though, to listen to the Leader of the Opposition. It reminds me of another episode of *Blue Hills* where we hear exactly the same speech time after time. The leader talked about incompetence and mismanagement of the budget and about exploding debt. However, the Leader of the Opposition was also very critical of the cuts of about \$600 million over the last two years to the capital works budget. At the same time, the leader was very critical of the inadequate funding for implementing the recommendations of the Forde inquiry and of the cut to the number of public servants.

The Leader of the Opposition talked about bad fiscal management and the fact that the Treasurer did not foresee the fiscal returns. Who could foresee what the American capitalists would do, because as CEOs all they did was manage companies? What happened with Enron? What happened with the outsourcing of its core business? After they stopped buying back their own shares, giving options to people and diluting the value of the shares, they started lying. After it was found that they were lying, all confidence left the market. They doctored the books. These people are the economic managers of the world. Members opposite will tell us that they are the people to follow. Nobody could foresee what would happen to the share market. Even if one could foresee that, what would be the difference to the budget deficit? It would not be any different. We make an estimate and that is it. In the end, the returns are what we get. A crystal ball would not make any difference, unless we could foresee that there would be a shortfall of \$400 million. If that were the case, what would we do? Cut capital works! Do we cut back on services to the public? What are the options in this wonderful world of funny money that the leader talks about?

The Leader of the Opposition accused the government of being party to burgeoning enterprise bargaining settlements but still is critical of significant pay increases to public servants. What would the leader have paid them—two per cent? The leader was critical of the fact that nurses and public servants were out on the street. I was on the executive of a union before I entered this parliament. In those days, Joh Bjelke-Petersen always looked after public servants by giving them a salary increase just before an election. Our government was very responsible in that whole process. We held the line very well, but the leader is still very critical of that. It is just like a broken record. It is so tedious and repetitious that it does not require a response, but I am giving one because it is time to do so. The leader is critical of the concept of 'buying' jobs. But 30 per cent or in excess of 53,000 jobs were created as a result of the Queensland economy, more than 50 per cent of which were full-time jobs.

Somehow or other, the Leader of the Opposition is critical of this unforeseen expenditure. It is not really unforeseen. We know there will be enterprise bargaining and salary increases. This is not unaccounted for by Treasury. Treasury has a reasonable idea of what it will cost. But because it does not know exactly how much money will be needed, it cannot appropriate for it. We cannot appropriate the money by putting it in a bucket and saying that this is what it will cost. We need to appropriate money for a particular purpose. That is exactly what the Magna Carta was about in 1215. One of the functions of any parliament is to ensure that we authorise the expenditure of monies. The leader is saying that there was \$371.8 million of unforeseen expenditure and that the Treasurer is incompetent and cannot manage his budget. What arrant nonsense.

I notice that the Leader of the Opposition criticised the north Queensland sitting in terms of what it cost and said that the Speaker was responsible for this. That is also nonsense. I am aware that the budget for north Queensland was less than what was estimated. The north Queensland parliament was under the control of the Speaker, not the Premier. With regard to the appropriations for Parliament, the leader seems to think it all right that there are unforeseen expenditures. I presume this is because the leader believes that it is okay to adjust members' salaries by the CPI every year. In fact, this amount was less than what the public servants received. I presume that Mr Horan would not want to accept those increases. Perhaps that sort of petty politics will be played in here. Again, public servants working in parliament must be given their increases via the enterprise bargaining process. It is very important that members undertake trade delegations and are part of a wider economy. That is the bottom line. I refer to the budget review committee and to the electorate officers because they do such a great job.

Mr Mackenroth: Do you realise that none of their members want to speak? No-one on the opposition benches is prepared to speak at this stage.

Mr FOURAS: If I sat down very quickly you could close the debate, but the Treasurer is too much of a gentleman to do that.

Mr Mackenroth: I have done that before.

Mr FOURAS: I am saying that the Treasurer would not do it. I will continue talking until the next government member is ready. The bottom line is that, as I was saying—

Mr Mackenroth: What we need is a Whip.

Mr FOURAS: Yes. The parliamentary budget needs to provide for training for electorate officers. I know that part of this increase in unforeseen expenditure relates to further support for the assistant electorate officer initiative. I suggest that, when the budget review committee looks at the parliament's budget next time, it tries to find some money for training. I am great believer in training. There is a great deal of new equipment and technology in our offices and there are great efficiencies to be gained by training our electorate officers. My electorate officer gained enormous benefits through training at the parliament.

I will conclude as I started. I have heard the economic nonsense from the Leader of the Opposition. On the one hand, he complains about a budget deficit. On the other hand, he complains about not having \$600 million more for capital works, cuts in Public Service numbers, inadequate service provision and the enterprise bargaining process. Does he think he could wave a magic wand and get the public servants back to work for less than a 3.5 per cent increase?

Mr Reynolds: He probably wants to hike the taxes up.

Mr FOURAS: He also indicated in his speech that we are looking for tax hikes. Does he have a magic pudding? It is time we had a realistic economic assessment from the shadow Treasurer and heard about realistic targets—the art of the possible. That is what politics is. Politics is about how one creates an economic cake and slices it. We ought to be hearing a bit more than simply naive criticism from the opposition. I commend the Treasurer for the way he has been handling his portfolio. I have every confidence that the Queensland economy is in the very best of hands, which has been highlighted by all sorts of indicators; for example, IT, employment and our capacity to attract big players, boost our economy and diversify it. This enables us to move further away from our reliance on primary produce, which at the moment is doing nothing to help our economic coffers; in fact, it is costing us dearly.

It is about time the Leader of the Opposition stood up in this chamber and said something meaningful instead of trying to be all things for all people. Sir Thomas Moore was said to be the man for all seasons at the time of Henry VIII. The Leader of the Opposition is the man for all arguments. He is trying to have five bob each way and I do not think that washes well at all.