



Speech by

## John-Paul Langbroek

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard Wednesday, 16 September 2009

---

### MOTION: SALE OF PUBLIC ASSETS, ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN

**Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.29 pm): I move—

That this House opposes the use of taxpayers' funds for an advertising and marketing campaign to promote the Premier's policy of privatisation of public assets.

The Premier will have us believe that the reason why 84 per cent of Queenslanders are against the sale of public assets is that they do not understand what she is trying to do, that they cannot see the forests for the sale of all the trees. Very clearly this is an issue that goes to two matters—one is taxpayer funded advertising and mail-outs and the other is truth in political advertising and campaigning. The people of Queensland are well aware of the Premier's intention to sell off parts of this state and they feel strongly about it. The member for Sunnybank, the Leader of the House, came out yesterday and said that we need to explain this better. This has all the resonance of Work Choices that became such an issue for the former federal government. This will become an issue for this state Labor government, which went to the election not talking about the things that it was going to do. The proof is in this week's Galaxy Poll. It shows that Queenslanders are outraged by this fire sale.

On the one hand, we have the Premier and the Treasurer saying, 'We are so broke. We have no money. We have budget deficits forecast for the next three or four years of \$14 billion.' Yet there is no detail of how much they are going to spend on these ads or where they are going to get the money. Only a few weeks ago the Premier, on her own 'saving her job' tour, went around Queensland and that cost \$1 million.

Sixty per cent of Queenslanders are dissatisfied with the job the Premier is doing. But what this poll does not reveal is the percentage of the Labor Party that is also dissatisfied with the member for South Brisbane. This is what members opposite have a chance to vote on tonight—whether they support the sale of assets and whether they support the advertising campaign that the government is clearly considering and is now saying that it needs to do to sell the idea to the people of Queensland.

I call on the member for Bundamba and the member for Waterford, who clearly stood up and claimed their lack of support for the Premier when this was first mooted, to support this motion, and I ask other members opposite to support this motion. They should support this motion about the use of taxpayers' funds when clearly their own constituents in their electorates and members of their unions are opposed to what the Premier has suggested, as has been evidenced by this Galaxy Poll. And that is also the feeling all of us on this side of the House get as we go around Queensland. This is the single biggest issue raised with us as we go around Queensland and meet Queenslanders. The Premier deceived her way through the last election and is now attempting to buy her way to the next election. Very clearly the people of Queensland will not stand for it. That is why there has been such a marked turnaround and no honeymoon for the Bligh Labor government since 21 March.

On 2 June we had the announcement of the privatisation of assets. This was in preparation for a budget that was brought down only a couple of weeks later—the sale of the tollways, the ports, Forestry Plantations Queensland and the above rail assets of Queensland Rail. Since then, the government has backtracked on some of the sale aspects because it could not find anyone to buy some parts of

Queensland Rail that it said it was going to sell. The Premier has told her party colleagues that she is intending to send a letter to every household in Queensland explaining that it is the tollways, not the roads, which are for sale and that it is the pine trees, rather than the land, the Premier is selling. But we know that what Premier Bligh is selling at a high cost to Queensland taxpayers is herself. It seems that the Galaxy Poll is just a trigger for the Premier to go on a taxpayer funded advertising blitz. As I mentioned, from the \$1 million campaign that coincided with the 'building for jobs' tour—or the 'saving my job' tour as we called it—to the latest advertising blitz selling the sale of assets, what is clear to the people of Queensland is this Premier's power-at-all-costs mentality.

I am very concerned that the state government's green paper has failed to mention the widespread concerns raised over the unethical use of taxpayer funds for politically driven government advertising. If elections are to be fair and if there are to be caps on political donations and/or expenditure, the government of the day must not be able to tap into unlimited public funding to conduct de facto election advertising or mail-out campaigns. For example, in February this year the Premier and Labor announced that taxpayers would fund a \$100,000 mail-out to homes on Brisbane's northside to address widespread concerns about the government's plan to close the Children's Hospital. One day after the mail-out the election was called, clearly indicating the mail-out was calculated so that taxpayer funds could offset Labor's political advertising budget. But was there any mention of the assets sales? None at all, and there was no mention of it in the Toward Q2 plan, the anniversary for which we had last week. *Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland states—*

The Queensland Government will play its part by:

- setting solid foundations for our State's economy, by maintaining a strong budget position and competitive taxes
- continuing to plan for and invest in infrastructure that allows our economy to grow, like roads, rail, public transport, ports, water and energy infrastructure

There is not a word about the things that the government was planning to do. That is why the people of Queensland have been sold out by the Bligh Labor government.

Equally, the state government routinely embarks on massive advertising expenditure to promote the Premier, ministers or the so-called achievements of the government. As I have already mentioned, \$1 million was allocated for a television advertising campaign to tell Queenslanders that the economy was being well managed despite the loss, as we have seen in this report card on the Q2 document, of the AAA credit rating, record debt, state final demand going backwards 2.5 per cent—the only state in Australia to go down—and low growth rates as a consequence of this government's decision.

In his corruption-fighting report, Tony Fitzgerald made a recommendation that has never been adopted during the almost 20 years of uninterrupted Labor government. Section 3.9.3 of the Fitzgerald report recommended—

Consideration should be given to establishing an all-party parliamentary committee to monitor the cost and workings of Ministerial and departmental media activities, including press secretaries, media units and paid advertising. This committee could analyse whether the money is being spent on informing the public, or distributing propaganda for political gain.

Clearly on this side we believe that this is propaganda for political gain. It continued—

It could also bring to the attention of Parliament any misrepresentation or misinformation emanating from the administration.

That is why in our blueprint, in response to the government's green paper, we have asked the following questions: do people believe the government is misusing taxpayer funded advertising to achieve a political benefit over a public benefit? Clearly we believe the answer is yes. As members are aware, we have also called for a royal commission. We have asked: should a royal commission look at imposing tough guidelines on government funded advertising and should any review of election expenditure and donations ensure that the government of the day does not have unfair advantage by being able to access taxpayer funds for political advertising? Do people believe the Fitzgerald report recommendation should be introduced to allow a parliamentary committee to regularly monitor and report on government advertising?

The second part of this motion goes to the issue of truth in political advertising and campaigning. Integrity and accountability in government starts with an onus on government to be up-front with Queenslanders about policies and finances. Clearly this government has not done it. Under threat of criminal action, a board of a private company is expected to be honest with shareholders about financial forecasts, assets sales and acquisitions, along with major policy decisions. Equally, under threat of criminal action, a company is required to outline an honest and factual prospectus to potential investors. This government has done none of that.

On the eve of the 2009 state election, both the Premier, the member for South Brisbane, and the state Treasurer, the member for Mount Coot-tha, concealed vital financial information and forecasts from the public. Indeed, it can be argued that they deliberately manufactured a false financial forecast to frame a budget and election commitments which Labor knew it could never deliver upon.

It was not until after the state election that Labor told Queenslanders that all its election commitments, promises and costings were predicated on the fire sale of assets as part of a rushed

privatisation agenda. Labor has reneged on wage agreements and introduced a 9c a litre fuel tax and we have high electricity prices. Labor has made this the most expensive state in the country in which to own and register a car. We have had increases to land tax valuations and manufacturing industry tax hikes. That is why we ask: would the people of Queensland support the introduction of truth in political advertising laws? This is the Treasurer who had to go through about 90 drafts of the budget speech just three months after an election. Very clearly, we have issues with probity in this government.

Very importantly, the point of this motion is that we need to have truth in advertising. We need to get to the heart of taxpayer funded advertising and mail-outs. If the Premier is looking for better ways to inform the public about assets sales, perhaps she should encourage her ministers to answer properly the questions that they have been asked in parliament. There have been plenty of opportunities for this government to publicise the assets sale; there will be plenty more. There is no need for this government to waste more taxpayers' funds trying to spin an unpopular assets sale that jeopardises the future of Queensland.