



Speech by

## Dr Mark Robinson

MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND

Hansard Friday, 19 June 2009

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### **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT (ASSET RESTRUCTURING AND DISPOSAL) BILL; FUEL SUBSIDY REPEAL AND REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Dr ROBINSON** (Cleveland—LNP) (9.03 pm): I rise to speak to the government's budget handed down by the Treasurer in this House on Tuesday. I use the term 'Treasurer' loosely because the destruction and havoc caused by the member for Mount Coot-tha shows there is little in this state that he treasures. His reckless abandoning of sound principles of economic management and his reckless pursuit of debt has turned a difficult financial situation into a disaster of titanic proportion.

Since he handed down his first budget, he has ridden on the GST windfalls of the Howard government, the mining royalties of the resources boom and a swathe of stamp duties from a buoyant housing market. The Treasurer was on top of the world only a few short years ago riding high on the boom. So how do we now face economic ruin today? The government would have us believe that it is solely due to the global financial crisis. What a fallacy it is. It was staring down the barrel of a gun long before the words 'global financial crisis' entered the public lexicon.

It was the Treasurer and now Premier who allowed growth in operating expenses to exceed growth in revenue in previous years. It was the Treasurer who allowed a massive \$64 billion debt to accumulate before the global financial crisis. The Bligh-Fraser brand of economic management has always been unsustainable. The global financial crisis accentuated what was already a major problem, yet still they persist with using the global financial crisis to escape accountability for their actions.

The government would have us believe that it must go into billions of dollars of debt in order to build infrastructure for the future. So what kind of future is the Labor Party building for Queensland? An \$85.5 billion debt that will likely climb towards a hundred billion. Our state's borrowings will exceed that of the entire nation during the disastrous Keating Labor government years. Extraordinarily, Queensland will borrow about \$18 billion more than our beleaguered southern neighbour New South Wales, despite having nowhere near the capacity to service that debt. Mums and dads across Queensland will share the burden to the tune of \$78,000 per household. The Treasurer's \$85.5 billion debt represents 40 per cent of the total debt of all of the states.

The Treasurer has attempted to couch and qualify this momentous economic failure with weasel word like 'manageable', 'temporary' and 'unprecedented' but his actions belie his words. This \$85.5 billion debt is simply unserviceable and will be the millstone that hangs around Queensland's neck while the rest of the country rebounds into economic growth.

One could be excused for thinking that the Treasurer loves heavy debt. He has been called many things during this week for his disastrous budget, for which he will be forever remembered. He has been suitably described as 'Fire Sale' Fraser, 'Boy Wonder' and like a hoon driving carelessly for his reckless driving of the Queensland economy. I would like to suggest another name for the Treasurer that

characterises his actions in this budget. It is clear that he would like to be known as a superhero, the one who saved the Queensland economy from the evils of the global financial crisis. But he is not Superman, not Batman, not even Robin—though that in some ways is close. He is 'Debt Man'. The name of the superhero that I feel best suits the Treasurer in this budget is 'Debt Man', fighting principles of sound economic management wherever encountered and destroying surpluses wherever found. But, alas, unlike other state Treasurers 'Debt Man' is unable to leap over the global financial crisis and to lead Queensland back into the promised land of surplus in the near future.

Then there is the Premier, who has never adequately explained where all of the money went from the boom. She wonders what happened. It has been noted that some people make things happen, others watch things happen, while others still wonder what happened. The Premier has no idea what happened to all the money from the boom. She wonders where it all went. The Premier could be aptly named 'I Wonder Woman'. She is still wondering what happened, and all together 'I Wonder Woman' and 'Debt Man' have fought off the forces of sound financial management and with it any chance of Queensland recovering soon.

But you have to feel for 'Debt Man'. 'I Wonder Woman' has deliberately stalled his leadership ambitions by ensuring that he will forever be known as the 'Debt Man' and blamed for the state's economic woes. He has become the patsy for the government's failed economic policies but, to make sure, 'I Wonder Woman' also made him do the impossible and create 100,000 breadwinning jobs.

But the story gets better. 'I Wonder Woman' and 'Debt Man' are joined by another superhero, 'The Joker'. But 'The Joker' is not considered too evil to join the team. 'The Joker' is disadvantaged, however, as he has inherited poor health. Yes, 'The Joker' is none other than the Deputy Premier, who was flying high until he contracted poor health. The poor health has set him back on his quest to one day compete with 'Debt Man' and to take over from 'I Wonder Woman'. The government's response to Queensland's financial woes that it helped to create is to sell off valuable state assets at the worst time. Instead of leaping tall buildings, the government is flogging them off.

Sell, sell, sell has replaced jobs, jobs, jobs. This sale of the century is a sell-out of the union movement that the government says it represents, of Labor principles that have been abandoned and, ultimately, of the people of Queensland. I oppose the government's fire sale of \$15 billion of public assets to pay for its spending and debt addictions. 'I Wonder Woman', 'Debt Man' and 'The Joker' are flogging off the batmobile, the batcave and Gotham City itself without having first spoken to the residents.

Another indictment on this government is its loss of its AAA credit rating. It has single-handedly lost this critical status when others have managed the global financial crisis without being downgraded. I should think Premier Rees will be sleeping soundly in New South Wales tonight knowing that his state can no longer be considered the basket case of the Australian economy. Premier Bligh has raised the bar for mismanagement so high that no other state could hope to compete with us. We have gone from the boom state to the broke state in just a few short years.

Very seriously, there is little in the 2009-10 budget for my electorate of Cleveland where the community is already suffering from years of infrastructure, drought and neglect at the hands of this government. Despite this massive debt-financed building program, very little building is taking place in Cleveland and the broader Redlands, identified by the government as a key growth corridor between Brisbane and the south coast. My constituents are not demanding people.

**Mr Johnson:** Are there koalas down there, Mark?

**Dr ROBINSON:** There are koalas down there. There are a few left. Like most Queenslanders, my constituents want security of property, of person and of employment. They want basic public services such as health and education to work for them. They want practical solutions to environmental issues, effective mass transit and main roads solutions and a strong police presence to combat the scourge of drug use and youth crime. We would have fared better from this government if the government could handle finance and if it truly cared enough for the region.

One of the reasons there is little to show is the work of the Treasurer, 'Debt Man'. 'Debt Man' has achieved something that few others ever have. By that I refer to the Treasurer's loss of Queensland's AAA rating. The head of the Queensland Treasury Corporation estimated that the rating downgrade would cost Queensland an extra \$1.2 billion every year in interest payments. Imagine what could be done in Cleveland with an additional \$1.2 billion every year. In a few years we could pay cash for many of the road, rail, bus, hospital, school, conservation and tourism needs just to name a few. However, instead we have again largely missed out.

As I mentioned previously, major transport infrastructure is desperately needed in Cleveland. For years my constituents have watched as the spoils of the mining boom were spent everywhere else but Cleveland. So much money goes out of the Redlands but not much comes back.

It is business as usual in this budget. While projects like the Northern Busway, Ipswich Motorway and Gold Coast rapid transit system receive funding, the Eastern Busway link to Capalaba remains so far

off it might as well be a pipedream. There is nothing in this budget that will assist bus services to and from Cleveland right now. The government has pushed the Eastern Busway project to Capalaba out until 2026 and it kept it out there when it had the opportunity to bring it forward. The busway link is desperately needed as transit times between the Redlands and the city creep up every year as traffic congestion becomes a major problem. Further, it is possible that there may be cuts to bus services in not only Cleveland but also Thornlands and Ormiston. I ask the Minister for Transport to confirm whether the government does plan to cut bus services within my electorate as has been rumoured.

Another need in Cleveland is the duplication of the Cleveland-Manly rail line. As it stands, trains on the line are few and far between and they are often packed like a tin of sardines. This discourages people to use the train network and forces them back onto the already congested roads. The government has again done nothing in this area and, again, no commitment to the Cleveland station upgrade seems to have been given. Queensland commuters are left out in the cold again.

Further, the government appears to have broken its election promise to upgrade parking at both the Ormiston and Birkdale stations. It also may have broken its promise of installing traffic signals at the corner of Shore and Wellington streets. I ask the Minister for Transport to hold to the government's election promises to the people of Cleveland and to confirm the situation.

I worked out why the Cleveland electorate continues to suffer from the infrastructure drought—no busway, no rail duplication and little spending on the roads. I worked it out while pouring over the budget documents that actually contain very little detail in them about Cleveland. It is a disgrace that details about the electorate were released to the *Redland Times* newspaper for publication today, not to me as the duly elected state representative. I call on the government to stop hiding facts from those elected by the public so that they can do the job they are elected to do.

Nevertheless, I may have worked out the reason for the transport infrastructure drought. The government appears to have lost or misplaced the Cleveland electorate. I refer to the diagram on page 1 of the Treasurer's Regional Budget Statement for greater Brisbane. In this diagram of greater Brisbane there is no mention of any suburb or any part of my electorate. There is no mention of Cleveland, Birkdale, Wellington Point, Ormiston or Thornlands anywhere on the mainland. It gets worse. North Stradbroke Island is wrongly labelled as South Stradbroke Island and has entirely migrated out of my electorate to Moreton Island. Stradbroke Island? What Stradbroke Island? Where has it gone? Maybe it swam north with some migrating whales. What a joke! The Treasurer's own budget paper for greater Brisbane is full of errors.

Even with their superhero powers, 'I Wonder Woman', 'Debt Man' and 'The Joker' cannot find my electorate in a diagram of greater Brisbane in its own budget papers. I guess you cannot build a road, train or busway to nowhere. This government barely seems to know where my electorate is for the purpose of government, yet the Premier seems to know where it is when she wants to take a holiday. They continue to ignore, neglect and forget the people of Cleveland. No wonder they lost the seat!

The cost of living for the people of Cleveland will rise dramatically under this Labor government. Residents will pay more for petrol, food, registration, electricity—well beyond the CPI. They will have to pay off Labor's mismanagement at the realtor, the bowser and the supermarket, and they will be paying for it for many years after those opposite have vacated the government benches.

The fuel tax will have a devastating impact upon Cleveland and the broader Redland city as 60 per cent of workers commute out of the area for work every day. Many of them use cars so their fuel bills to earn a living will skyrocket. It will also put further strain on public transport.

There are very few measures in this budget that assist the small and medium sized businesses of Cleveland to support their current workforce, let alone create new jobs. The facilities at Toondah Harbour are ageing and are now inadequate and in need of a major upgrade. This will create many local jobs and boost our local economy—again overlooked in this budget.

While I welcome the previous commitment of funds towards the expansion of the emergency department at the Redlands Hospital, it has been long overdue. We are also anticipating our fair share of the \$20.93 million allocated for new ambulances across the greater Brisbane area.

Stewardship of the environment is a top priority in my electorate of Cleveland, and I have been incredibly disappointed in recent weeks at the government's lack of practical solutions to the problems we are faced with. In this budget no money is allocated to the expansion of the Stradbroke Island National Park, something the government previously promised to deliver. Disappointing also was the government's commitment to an ecological study of the Moreton Bay Marine Park, promising a paltry \$500,000 for a monitoring program. As any marine scientist will tell you, adequately mapping an environment as biologically diverse and geographically expansive as Moreton Bay would take several years and many millions of dollars. It illustrates once again that this government is more interested in environmental symbolism than tangible outcomes. Related to this issue is ecologically sustainable fishing. I look forward to receiving Cleveland's fair share of the fishing infrastructure funding announced during the election.

Who could forget the plight of the Redlands koalas? It appears that the government has. They are facing extinction in the near future unless the government takes action. I call on it to increase further funding towards koala research and corridor land acquisition among other measures in Cleveland.

In addition to these measures I have listed, I continue to call on the government to take several additional steps: one, to increase the number of police and teacher aides in Queensland; two, to renew the funding to the One Punch Can Kill anti-violence campaign; three, to increase funding for the Bayside Domestic Violence Initiative; and, four, to provide further funding to support families and underprivileged individuals.

I will conclude with this. The Premier, 'I Wonder Woman', the Treasurer, 'Debt Man', and the Deputy Premier, 'The Joker', are not superheroes and they never will be. They are a dysfunctional family and what they have done to the Queensland economy in this budget and previous ones makes them villains. 'I Wonder Woman' told untruths to the people of Queensland about why we needed an early election. She told untruths about the fuel tax. They told untruths about the asset sales.

'Debt Man' sold off the batmobile after taxing the bat fuel so that it was not affordable to run. He flogged off the batcave and hocked Gotham City to the hilt. Why? So the trio can stay in power. That is all this is about—surviving through to the next election where they can write up another fantasy and hope again to dupe the people of Queensland.

What about poor Albert in all this? Albert is the forgotten butler in this superhero story. Albert is representative of the people of Cleveland and the workers elsewhere in Queensland. He has been betrayed by our superheroes. The only answer for Queenslanders now is to survive the next two years of this government and to evict the pretenders, the villains in the 2011 state election, and bring in a new LNP government and an era of prosperity for all Queenslanders.