




Speech By
Annastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Newman Government, Performance

 **Ms PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.31 am): I understand that yesterday the Premier addressed his LNP caucus and talked about what a good story he had to tell, a good story on behalf of the Newman government. Well, I would like to politely disagree. The front page of today's *Courier-Mail* is not a good story to tell. I do want to put on record that the member for Redlands has done the right and honourable thing in standing down as chair of the Ethics Committee while this matter is under investigation. While we were on leave after the last session of parliament, we also had the revelations from the member for Moggill, known now as the 'Flegg tapes'. Let me make it very clear that that was not a good story to tell.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Madam SPEAKER: I warn the member for Gregory and ask him to cease interjecting. I call the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms PALASZCZUK: We have also seen from this government the resignation of Minister Bates, Minister Flegg and Minister Gibson—also not a good story to tell the people of Queensland. And who can forget the member for Redcliffe? That is also not a good story to tell. Let's talk about the Premier's hand-picked director-general, Michael Caltabiano. It was revealed during estimates that he was paid in excess of \$650,000. I understand this matter is still under investigation, but that is not a good story to tell Queenslanders.

But there is something that stands out and that puts all of these other issues to the side, and that is the sacking of some 14,000 workers by this Newman government. Today I want to draw the attention of the House, and indeed the attention of all Queenslanders, to a shocking, startling exchange that is almost incomprehensible in the degree of callousness it exposes on behalf of the individual who purports to care for everyone who lives and works in this state—the Premier.

Everyone remembers the Premier sincerely promising public sector workers before the 2012 election that they had nothing to fear from an LNP government. They now see that sincerity for what it was—fraudulent—because, once he had his feet under the Premier's desk, the mass sackings started. Almost immediately upon taking office 16 months ago the Premier set about systematically destroying some 14,000 families by sacking the breadwinners who made their living as public servants.

What everyone always suspected is that nobody on that side, unlike those of us on this side, really cared about those who were being tossed on to the dole queue, that the people being sacked were just numbers to them. What can be revealed today is proof that this government's lack of care is systemic—and it starts at the top. As a demonstration of that uncaring, unfeeling, cold and heartless attitude, I want to read directly from an exchange between the Premier and a senior member of his staff which goes to the cold, black core of this cruel and self-centred government, led by Premier Newman.

On Friday, 29 July last year—which all of those who work in government will have etched in their memories as ‘black Friday’—the Premier launched the first offensive in his determined war against public sector workers by starting his campaign of sackings. On that day 14,000 people were told to clear out their desks. On that day lives were ruined. On that day families were left bewildered about how they would pay the bills and how they would put food on the table. Nobody in Queensland, and nobody in this place, can deny the genuine concern felt throughout the community for the thousands of people who had been afforded no dignity, no respect and certainly no care from this government. It was no secret that there was a very real fear for the wellbeing of those thousands of workers—many of them left in a delicate state of mind at the shock and brutality of this Premier’s mass sacking campaign.

Certainly that wide concern was widely reported in the media. But the Premier had only one thing on his mind, and that was how his crumbling image would emerge. In emails between the Premier and the head of his government media unit on that ‘black Friday’, obtained under right to information, there is an extremely telling exchange, and I will quote: ‘Public service story was on three commercials ...’, Mr Lee Anderson wrote to the Premier at 6.22 pm after he had obviously viewed 6 pm broadcasts reporting the blood-letting on channels 10, 9 and 7. Mr Anderson continued, ‘... which is really starting to become tiresome.’ Let me just repeat that line so everyone is very clear what Mr Anderson said: ‘which is really starting to become tiresome.’ That is how those at the highest level of this government feel about 14,000 people being distressed after losing their livelihoods—it becomes ‘tiresome’ when such facts are reported.

Mr Anderson went on to tell the Premier that Channel 9 news ‘reported cases of self-harm as a result of job losses’ before he added, ‘I reckon the public perception of how many have been sacked far outweighs the reality.’ And then—shockingly, appallingly, dreadfully—came the Premier’s reply: ‘How did I end up looking?’ I will give everyone just a moment to take that in: ‘How did I end up looking?’ I ask members on that side of the House to take a moment and give that response very careful consideration. While thousands were in the midst of attempting to dust themselves off after they had been sacked, while families sat around their tables anguishing about how they would pay the bills, while thousands of people were stripped of their dignity, while people who had been in jobs for decades were suddenly shown the door and while genuine concerns were held for their state of mind and their wellbeing, what was the Premier thinking of? His one and only response was, ‘How did I end up looking?’ ‘How did I end up looking on the news?’

The fact that this Premier with the stroke of a pen ruined 14,000 lives is appalling enough. The fact that one of the most senior members of his staff found the concerns of those 14,000 lives tiresome is scandalous. The fact that this Premier’s first area of concern amidst the blood-letting was how he looked on the nightly news at six o’clock defies belief. It also shows Queenslanders what they could expect in the frightening scenario where Tony Abbott takes office: the Newman government is the entree and an Abbott government would clearly be the main course.

The self-interest of this Premier is without measure. The self-interest and twisted priorities of this Premier and his government know no bounds, but Queenslanders can see through this facade. They are right to imagine a Premier who leaves his office on level 15 of the Executive Building each day after watching the nightly news chanting, ‘Mirror, mirror on the wall.’ They see a government and a Premier which continue to sack workers and refuse to rule out sacking thousands more in the future only to try to sneak through grotesque pay hikes that as I speak see the Premier on a wage equivalent to the President of the United States. They see a government that sells off public housing and throws elderly retirement home residents onto the street. They see a government that closes down important schools and at the same time ploughs ahead with a new building for themselves and their ministers. They see a government that refuses ambulance officers a fair wage for a fair day’s work. This is not a good record of government. Queenslanders will know better come the next election and send them a very clear message—

(Time expired)