



Speech By  
**Curtis Pitt**


**MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE**

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**MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

**Strong Choices Campaign**

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (11.37 am): The \$6 million Strong Choices spin campaign is the most misleading and overtly political use of taxpayer funding I have seen in this state. It is a campaign that breaches the Newman government's own advertising code of conduct. Taxpayers are now funding a letter from the Treasurer saying—and I quote—'We are being held back by long-term debt, accumulated by previous governments, of almost \$80 billion.' This statement is categorically untrue. The \$80 billion figure does not even reflect the current debt level. The LNP are spending taxpayer's money to convince Queenslanders that they were left with debt of \$80 billion so they can claim to have lowered debt when, in reality, they have increased debt.

Taxpayer funded political propaganda like this has no place in our democracy. It is offensive and I am being contacted by many Queenslanders who are outraged at this waste of their money. Looking at the budget papers—and not made-up figures by private sector spin doctors—gross debt is expected to increase from \$62.4 billion under the previous government to \$77 billion by 30 June this year. This is an increase of \$14.6 billion under the Newman government, or more than \$830,000 per hour. Most of this Newman government increase in debt has been for assets that earn no income, with general government debt increasing by \$13.6 billion. Under the previous government, Queensland had the lowest general government net debt in the country at negative \$3.12 billion. It is now approaching \$9.2 billion under the Newman government.

The Strong Choices misinformation on debt is all about conning Queenslanders into supporting asset sales in order to fund the LNP's election promises. The television advertisements imply that by simply making their 'strong choices', the state will no longer have \$4 billion in annual interest payments. If \$25 billion to \$30 billion of debt is paid down, the state will still have interest payments and we will have lost the profits of income-earning assets. To imply that their proposed 'strong choices' will provide \$4 billion per year for 25 new schools or to rebuild a regional hospital every year is simply rubbish. It is nothing more than taxpayer funded political propaganda designed to place an asset sales loaded gun to Queenslanders' heads.

If the television advertisements are not misleading enough, the website is even worse. The opposition has received many complaints from people who had their submissions altered by the website to support asset sales and to mandate an arbitrary \$25-\$30 billion debt pay-down target. No independent ratings agency has ever said that this particular debt repayment strategy is needed, with the website saying it is from lifetime Liberal Party member Peter Costello. What makes the campaign even more misleading is that when Peter Costello picked this \$25-\$30 billion pay-down figure, it was with reference to gross debt at that time being \$64 billion—not a made-up \$80 billion figure. So not only does the website make a claim that is not backed up by any independent source, it is not even what Peter Costello had recommended. Such is the dishonesty of this government.

The Strong Choices website claims that the sale of the Gladstone and Townsville ports, the Mount Isa rail line and SunWater pipelines and power stations will provide proceeds of just \$5.3 billion. If these sale values are to be believed, it would mean that selling these assets would provide no net benefit to the budget bottom line. The lower interest payments from paying down debt would be wiped out by lost returns from these businesses. The website deliberately avoids telling voters about this and claims that selling these assets will help the budget bottom line.

The website also states that obtaining private sector funding for the electricity network will somehow lower debt by \$28.4 billion. This figure is wrong, and the opposition has asked the Treasurer to take down his website and fix this immediately. It is not only the opposition saying this. The government's own scoping study consultant, ACIL Allen, says it would require partial divestment of the electricity network businesses. They said—

Stumping up equity ... without having a say over how the business is going to be run is going to be very unattractive.

A director at Fitch Ratings has also questioned the \$28 billion figure. The Premier has promised in this parliament that there will be no divestment of Energex, Ergon or Powerlink in this term or the next. The proposal on the Strong Choices website is a misrepresentation to make it appear like it is not a breach of this promise when it clearly is. While this government says they are asking Queenslanders for their 'strong choices', they are simultaneously spending undisclosed millions of taxpayers' dollars on investment banks to push ahead with a mass asset sell-off anyway.

The reality is Queenslanders have no choices under a Newman government that is determined to push ahead with its bad choices to engage in a mass asset sell-off. The LNP are spending taxpayers' money on a political propaganda campaign designed to blame those same taxpayers for the decisions the LNP have made to fund their election promises.

Queenslanders sent a message to all politicians at the last election. They want to keep public assets in public hands for the long-term. Labor listened to that message. The only 'strong choices' for Queenslanders will be at the next election. The LNP will sell your assets; Labor won't.

**Government members** interjected.