




Speech By
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

Finance and Administration Committee, Report

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (3.38 pm): The hearing on Treasury and Trade was symptomatic of a shambolic, farcical series of hearings this year that reflect poorly on the Newman government. The Treasurer's response to questions from non-government members was to chew up the committee's time with government spin. Exhibit A: the Treasurer had his Under Treasurer read out over 125 figures when this information should have been tabled for accuracy. It was both disappointing and unbecoming. It shows just how desperate this government has become to avoid scrutiny.

Once again the Treasurer refused to detail how much money has been spent on asset sales scoping study consultants with no election mandate. The claims from the Treasurer that scoping study consultants must operate in a market of price secrecy are complete and utter rubbish. The Abbott government released its budget for scoping study consultants in the 2014-15 budget. If it can do it, why can't the Treasurer? The previous government released details of scoping study consultant costs in the 2009-10 Treasury annual report prior to transactions proceeding or, in some cases, commencing. If the previous government could release these costs, why can't the Treasurer? Of course the Treasurer can release this information, but he refuses to because he knows that Queenslanders will be outraged when they find out that the Newman government has spent tens of millions of dollars on its asset sales program in secret before even asking Queenslanders at an election.

The Treasurer also refused to rule out providing the private sector with a controlling management stake over the electricity network. He said it would have been a mammoth task to have told Queenslanders about this as part of Strong Choices. What this really means is that the hiring of scoping study consultants is not about informing Queensland about the structure of these proposed asset sales. He said a decision on whether he would hand control of our electricity network assets over to the private sector would only be made after an election, so Queenslanders will not know what they are voting for. One thing Queenslanders can be certain of is that a vote for the LNP will be a vote for the divestment of Energex, Ergon and Powerlink. As described in the budget papers, this is in direct contradiction to the Premier's pledge in this parliament last year that he would not seek a mandate for the divestment of these assets.

The Treasurer also repeatedly refused to detail the full cost of the Strong Choices propaganda. While the answer to question on notice No. 2 detailed an additional internal allocation of \$4.2 million in 2014-15, no answer was provided on the internal allocation for 2013-14. This means that, contrary to the statements of the Premier and the Treasurer, the confirmed expenditure on Strong Choices is actually \$15.4 million and once the internal allocation for 2013-14 is included it is likely to be around \$20 million. It is fundamentally dishonest and a disgrace for this government to spend over \$15 million of taxpayers' money to make categorically false claims that the previous government left \$80 billion of accumulated debt when the budget papers clearly state that gross debt was \$62 billion in 2011-12,

nearly half of which was self-sustaining and held by GOCs. Gross debt is not even at \$80 billion today. For the same Treasurer to cut ribbons at projects funded by his government's increase in debt while denying all responsibility for its own spending decisions this entire term in office shows that it is an immature and hollow government. The Treasurer had few answers at the estimates for why deficits on his own preferred fiscal measure have blown out by \$884 million from 2011-12 to 2014-15 compared with the previous government. While there have been some downward revisions in revenue, these pale in comparison to those Labor dealt with during the GFC and natural disasters and are partly a result of the LNP's decision to cut too hard and too fast into essential services. These higher deficits under the Newman government also reveal the true reasons peak debt has lowered from \$85 billion to \$82 billion. The debt trajectory has lowered because of a \$2.9 billion sell down in Aurizon shares and a lowering in infrastructure spending of \$630 million from 2011-12 to 2014-15.

Over its first three budgets, the LNP has made over \$13 billion in policy decisions to either increase spending or cut revenue. These are decisions that, in the Premier's words, a 'grown-up' government would take responsibility for and not seek to blame on the former government. The Treasurer again refused to release the consultancy register or expenditure on consultants. The previous government released this information in response to questions on notice. This government will not even fully disclose this information in response to right to information requests. The opposition is aware of many private sector spin doctors other than the Phillips Group, which has made \$422,828 from the taxpayer to date. Two things that the Newman government's third budget confirmed are, one, that the economy is growing more slowly and unemployment is significantly higher under the LNP than it was under Labor; and, two, the LNP wants to undertake the largest privatisation program in Queensland's history—\$33.6 billion worth. *Brisbane Times* columnist John Birmingham has had this government pegged for some time. Queensland, 'Mr Strong Choices' is an idiot, and he thinks you are one, too!