




Speech By
Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (6.05 pm): I rise to speak on the 2014 budget. I was in here on the night that we saw the privatisation of many of our assets—the ports, the railways and some of the state forests—and I think we were debating that matter until at least 4 or 4.30 in the morning. I can remember the venom at that time of the LNP members who were in opposition. They were voicing their anger at the Labor Party and saying, ‘How dare you sell off our profitable assets, our income-producing assets’—to the point where they were frothing at the mouth. Their argument was that we should not be about selling assets, rather we should be about building assets and growing the economy and having income going back to the state. There was only one person who was very, very supportive of this—and that was the Treasurer. He was frothing at the mouth because he wanted more sold. It is very hypocritical to hear LNP members tonight bragging about how we need to sell our assets but then accusing the Labor Party of doing the same thing.

The state budget is a massive con job, but it is not conning. The LNP is going to try to sell off at least \$33 billion in state profit-producing assets if it wins government at the next election. These assets belong to every Queenslanders, but the government is relying on its 30-seat majority to flog them off. The government believes that because it has a 30-seat majority it can make many sacrifices. If it had a five-seat majority, the LNP members would be talking a different language. They would be saying, ‘We are growing the economy. There is going to be six per cent growth by 2016-17. There will also be a \$700 million surplus.’ That is what they would be saying if there were a five-seat majority, but there is a 30-seat majority.

I have only been here for 10 years—I heard that the member for Callide has been here much longer, and likewise the member for Gregory who has just walked out of the chamber—but I have seen this parliament change over the years and new faces have continued to come in and many people have left. I will tell members why there are not many people who have been here for a long time left; it is because they have been too frightened to take a stand for their electorate and make the decisions. They just agree to what their government is putting forward that is controversial and that is against the interests of the people of Queensland.

When Newman came to power, it was like, ‘Do you realise who we are? We are the Newman government. We can do anything we like, but we will never do anything terrible like the Labor Party did and sell our profitable assets.’ I can see all of the backbenchers in here who said in their maiden speeches, ‘There’s one thing we will never do and that’s go down the path of the Labor Party and sell our assets. We will always stand up for our electorates.’ I want to say this to the LNP: yes, you have a 30-seat majority but you will not have many of those 30 seats left after the next election because there is a tidal wave coming unless you take this chance and make a decision. The LNP is turning its back on Queensland.

These are our assets built by the hardworking taxpayers of Queensland. Have LNP members ever been out there on the railway tracks and seen the TIs and the South Sea islanders working those

tracks and building them? These assets are about to be sold off and, as I said, the government members and the Treasurer are frothing at the mouth to have them sold. I am calling on the Treasurer to conduct an independent assessment—

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Berry): Order! Member for Dalrymple, just hold on a second. Honourable members, I do want to hear the member for Dalrymple if you would not mind.

Mr KNUTH: I am calling for an independent assessment of the income that will be lost over the next 20 years if these assets are sold. Surely that is not much to ask for—an independent assessment of the income that we will lose over a 20-year period. I am appalled that the government is—and I will not use the word ‘misleading’; I will use something else, but I cannot think of another word, so I will have to say—misleading Queenslanders by spruiking that the private sector investment will drive electricity prices down. We have already suffered a loss due to the entry of private investment into the retail arm of our energy sector and this has seen electricity prices triple. The Treasurer was saying that, by stopping electricity prices from going up, we will ask private investors to invest into our energy sector. We have already done that. That is why we have seen our electricity prices triple.

Peter Beattie even got up and said that the biggest mistake he ever made was privatising the retail arm of our energy sector because he could not believe how greedy the corporates were in ripping off the average consumer. This is exactly the same thing. The last thing we want is multinational corporatisation and then we have to pay our electricity bill to those big corporates. The reality is that privatisation of energy assets will see further skyrocketing of households’ and businesses’ electricity costs. Corporations invest to generate profits, and profits will come from everyone’s electricity bills, hitting hard and heavy on the already stretched budgets of households, businesses and farms.

I keep hearing about this carbon tax. I was also here the night when the Labor Party, with the LNP, voted to pass the cost of the carbon tax not onto the energy companies but onto the consumers. So we are receiving an extra cost not just because of the Labor Party but also because of the LNP. I feel that it is very hypocritical of the government to point their finger at someone regarding the carbon tax when they did the same thing themselves. In selling profitable assets they are doing exactly the same thing themselves. But, worse, they are using their 30-seat majority in this House in the belief that they can hoodwink the people of Queensland into selling something that is very, very important to us. When each member of parliament came to this House, they said, ‘I am going to take a stand for my electorate.’ Some may have thought they might be able to feather their own nest, but most came in here for the people of Queensland.

I say go to the Mount Isa railway track and talk to those workers and say, ‘I’m going to vote to sell this off and you are going to work for some Indian company.’ That is what happened at the Bowen port.

Mr Dowling: That’s racism. Why do you hate Indians?

Mr KNUTH: Why not, because that is what happened. ‘But you are going to work.’

Mr Dowling: Unbelievable!

Mr KNUTH: Why doesn’t the member opposite go and tell them that they will work for some foreign company that does not understand those little townships, that does not understand how those townships rely on those railway stations or that the towns rely on those jobs. All they have to do is upgrade that railway track. It is very simple; as the railway track is upgraded, it will receive more transport haulage and there will be more profits going back to Queensland. It is so simple, but what does the government do? It sells it off. The chief economist has said that the budget is a billion dollars short. Of course, we are a billion dollars short, because we privatised the coal component of Queensland Rail. Previously, \$1.2 billion was coming in each year that we now do not have, and the government is telling us that the privatisation of assets is a great thing. It is these assets that are keeping our schools going and paying off debt, which they keep talking about. At present, the Mount Isa line returns a quarter of a million dollars each year, and we are selling that. How stupid! That is already coming in and is paying off interest. If we keep selling these assets, governments will have to resort to mass taxation and increased charges to boost the state’s falling income.

I was disgusted—and I do not think I was the only one—that the government had proposed punishing our seniors with a cut of \$233 million that was available to concession card holders as a discount on their rates and electricity bills. These are our most vulnerable citizens. While the LNP throw money at a \$6 million Premier’s precinct, a new \$5 billion tunnel and feather their own nest with a massive pay rise, the elderly are told to tighten their belts. This is shameful. However, they backed down. Some of the backbenchers said to us, ‘We can’t take this anymore. We sacked 14,000 public

servants. We declared war on doctors and motorbike riders. Now we are targeting the frail and the elderly. And the only friends that we have left are the big corporate buddy mates. They are the only ones who are going to look after us, who give us the cash in the pocket. These are the only ones. So we are losing everyone: the motorbike riders, the public servants, the police, the firies—the whole lot. The only friends we have are the big corporate buddies who will give us cash donations at whim.' That does not leave many voters left.

I will read a letter that I have received, because the Treasurer talked about the strong choices and a \$5 million campaign. The letter from Mr Glenn Whybird, a former LNP voter, states—

We, the public, were recently invited to assist the government by answering a web based questionnaire. In good faith I opened the link to participate, but was completely dismayed by the bias inherent in the questions. In all conscience I could not participate, because I could not see any way that my real opinion could be obtained. Filling out the survey, I believe, could only be used as support for the present government's apparent railroading policies. These appear to be forging ahead with their own agenda and, at the same time, claiming that they are being consultative.

Along with an increasing number of Queenslanders, I am absolutely horrified by the seemingly increasing amount of money being wasted by the Newman Government on advertising. This horrendous expenditure is totally unnecessary, achieves nothing for Queensland except promote the ego of this apparently dictatorial government. I would like to know how much money has been spent on advertising since this irresponsible government has come to power? Newman and, what I see as his minion henchmen, appear to have cost many jobs in this state, yet they claim to have created jobs. The only jobs I can see that they are responsible in creating is in the advertising industry.

If it wasn't so pitiful, the parliamentary allowance grab by this group of government parliamentarians would be a complete joke. At the same time that they are asking their average constituents to accept savage cuts to services and rampant price increases, they grant themselves a disgraceful increase. The electorate does not see it any other way than politicians feathering their own nests and thumbing their noses at their constituents who put them there.

I, along with many others, hoped after the last election that this inexperienced group of our elected representatives would have the intestinal fortitude to make decisions for us that were fair and equitable for our State.

I think he is right there because that is why the LNP backbenchers believed they were coming in. It goes on—

I, along with many others, am severely disillusioned.

Any representations you can make to have these issues would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Glenn Whybird

I table that letter, and he is very happy for me to do so.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 30 May 2014, from Mr Glenn Whybird to member for Dalrymple, Mr Shane Knuth MP, regarding the performance of the Queensland Government [\[5343\]](#).

Reading from today's *Townsville Bulletin*, the headline is 'Funding snub will cost votes' and it states—

Premier Campbell Newman would have to be crazy to turn his back on North Queensland.

Fortress Townsville delivered five LNP members down in George St but it's unlikely they will all be returned after the next election if the region doesn't get its fair share of the privatisation of local assets.

The retail arm of Ergon could be sold off to investors while the Port of Townsville is expected to be privatised via a 99-year lease if the LNP win the next election.

Those two assets could raise as much as \$2 billion for the State Government.

But what is the Government promising to deliver for North Queensland?

Nothing.

We aren't guaranteed of even getting 1c because the money will be distributed through a competitive grant process after the election.

How can we trust you? Can you explain or show me how we can possibly trust you? Then it states—

Cairns could get another convention centre while Mackay may get an even newer stadium, while our city gets robbed again.

Thuringowa MP Sam Cox has staked his career on getting the money for North Queensland but I'd suggest the LNP give a rock-solid funding guarantee to the region or he will lose his job.

I, just like many other non-committed voters in the region, will switch my vote if there is no guarantee that the proceeds of privatisation will be reinvested in North Queensland.

These are the comments from the Treasurer, who says—

Do you want to own a power generator or a port, or would you like to see the port leased and the proceeds of that used to build a new football stadium?

Have you ever seen the port of Townsville, with all the trains and cranes moving that equipment and the magnitude of those ships? What is he saying? He says, 'What would you rather, a port or a football stadium?'

Then the member for Mundingburra, David Crisafulli, is quoted as saying—

I think we are facing a golden opportunity that comes with a long-term lease of the port to actually do something. Great cities have a stadium in the CBD.

The member for Thuringowa, Sam Cox, said—

As long as it is spent on something the community and council is happy with, I am in favour of it.

I notice that was one member of the council who wanted a sports stadium. This is about squandering our income-producing assets. The Great Northern Railway, which was built by the hardworking taxpayers of Queensland and which provided work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and South Sea islanders for the purpose of opening up massive investment, is about to be sold off; likewise the ports—and you are talking about selling all of this off for a sports stadium? It is like selling your business to pay off 25 per cent of your house and to put in a swimming pool, and then you realise that you have to go and get a job.

If the backbenchers could get out of their subterranean existence to venture out and have a look at the real world out there, they would see that Queenslanders want good governance and good government. The Treasurer bragged about returning to a \$800 million surplus in 2016. We were very disturbed to discover that the amount allocated for road infrastructure funding in the south-east was \$7 billion but only \$700 million for North Queensland. We did not see anything in the budget for the upgrade of the Gregory Development Road. I put in a submission to the Deputy Premier to upgrade Snake Creek, Stockyard Creek, the Basalt River, Clarke River and the Cape River. There are also 70 kilometres left to upgrade which would provide investment to open up those areas, and likewise for the Hann Highway. If you say that I have not brought it to your attention, I am bringing it to your attention right now.

The budget should be about investing in these areas and opening them up; not spending all this money on sports stadiums. Of course they are a great thing, but we have plenty of them at this present moment. There is a lot more that I could speak about, but time is not on my side.