




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH

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MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Queensland Economy

 **Mr MINNIKIN** (Chatsworth—LNP) (11.26 am): I rise to speak about the future of our great state and the journey that we must embark upon to move forward our state's economy. Just shy of two years ago I stood in this hallowed chamber and gave my maiden speech to the Queensland parliament. In that speech, one of the key messages that I touched upon was the importance of responsibility: responsibility to ourselves, our community and, most importantly, to our children and future generations. As politicians we are the guardians of our state for a finite period of time. Therefore, we are tasked with making judicious decisions to ensure the security and wellbeing of our state well into the future. As such, we must govern for the future, rather than dwell on the past. In the immortal words of Spanish philosopher George Santayana—

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

Unfortunately, both our state and our nation's political history are littered with examples of the financial illiteracy of various Labor governments. Time and time again we have witnessed Labor governments ride into government in times of financial security and growth only to, over the course of their time in office, squander the government surplus and accrue a staggering amount of debt. But, to paraphrase the words of the late, great Baroness Margaret Thatcher, the problem is that you eventually run out of other people's money.

The former state Labor government took this spending spree to an unprecedented level, decimating our state's finances and overspending to the point at which it had to take out loans to cover its operational expenses. As a career businessman prior to entering politics, I find the concept of borrowing money to pay staff and to rent office space utterly absurd and economically reckless.

As a direct result of the former government's fiscal irresponsibility, an ominous \$80 billion black cloud of debt now hangs over the head of our state, representing the largest per capita debt of any mainland state in Australia. As it can be difficult to conceive what such a large figure means in concrete terms, here are the facts. By the time I have finished delivering my speech Queensland will have accrued over \$37,000 in interest. That figure compounds to approximately \$450,000 in interest each and every hour. To put Queensland's debt into perspective, we need to repay the cost of an average family home each hour—assuming that it was owned outright—to stop the debt level rising without even making a dent in the \$80 billion loan.

So what does that mean to the Chatsworth community that I am proud to represent? It means that every year \$4 billion of taxpayers' hard-earned money must be spent on interest payments alone. Sadly, that means that we cannot build the equivalent of 20 new primary schools, 10 350-bed hospitals or 220 kilometres of a new four-lane highway. I am certain the residents of the Chatsworth electorate would rather that interest bill be spent on an upgrade to the city bound section of Old

Cleveland Road to alleviate peak hour bus congestion or an improvement to the amenity of Gumdale State School, just to name a couple of projects.

We believe that Queenslanders deserve better. We believe that it is not good enough that hard earned taxpayer dollars are being squandered on interest payments rather than building infrastructure and investing further in front-line services. Already we have proven ourselves to be a fiscally responsible government and we are making great strides towards building Queensland's financial security. We have increased state economic growth to 4.1 per cent, far exceeding the national average of 1.9 per cent. We have also gone from the highest unemployment rate in the country to the second lowest through our commitment to reducing red tape and creating jobs. Most importantly, we have managed to stop the existing debt from increasing further, which has been no mean feat. If we had not made significant policy changes our state's debt could have escalated further.

However, despite our best efforts the debt cloud still looms large over our heads, amounting to almost \$15,000 for every man, woman and child in our great state compared to around \$8,300 in other mainland states. That is why we are asking Queenslanders to join the discussion about how we can best pay down our state's debt. The reality is there is no magic bullet. Despite asking for a fourth solution, the practical reality is that there are three potential solutions to get Queensland fully back on its feet financially. The first is to increase taxes, the second is to decrease services and the third is the long-term lease or sale of select state government businesses. I appreciate that Queenslanders will hold strong views regarding all of the options on the table, and rightly so. This is why we have affirmed time and time again that we will not be moving forward with any of these strategies without having an open and honest conversation with the people of Queensland first and taking into account their personal views and priorities for our state's finances. Why? Because unlike the former Bligh Labor government we understand that these decisions affect each and every Queenslander and therefore these decisions belong to us all.

The Newman government will not show contempt for Queenslanders by divesting any government owned businesses without a clear mandate. I encourage all Chatsworth constituents and Queenslanders in general to contribute to this important discussion over the coming months and put forward their suggestions as to how we can effectively and responsibly pay down the debt we have inherited from the former Labor government and to ensure Queensland's financial security well into the future. Our kids deserve no less.