




Speech By
Tim Nicholls

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (12.10 pm): Mr Speaker, I join with other members in congratulating you on your election to office two days ago. I join with the Leader of the Opposition in also congratulating the government on its success in the recent election campaign, as I have done so in a number of places since the election, particularly at the St Patrick's Day dinner where I acknowledged the Premier's success. However, I need to register my total support for the opposition in the debate on this confidence motion, moved today by the Premier and seconded by the Deputy Premier. In doing so, I want to thank the people of Clayfield for the opportunity to serve them here again.

During the course of the debate this morning I have heard comments made by the member for South Brisbane—the Deputy Premier—about people coming up to her and asking her questions, comments made by the member for Ashgrove about questions that have been asked of her and I think I even heard the member for Woodridge, who obviously has a constituency different from his previous one, refer to people coming up to him and talking to him about things. Let me tell members what the people of Clayfield said to me after my election. They asked, 'How could this happen? How could a government be formed with no plan, with no idea?' Increasingly, like the emperor with no clothes, the government members are being seen for what they are, with the domination of the union movement, the control of the left wing of the party with seven out of 14 ministers all sitting there cutting deals—

A government member interjected.

Mr NICHOLLS: The member for Sandgate is stuck out there on the end, representing God knows what out there at Sandgate in terms of his union constituency. I know the member for Sandgate. I get on quite well with him. As they do in the British parliament, I am quite happy to call him my honourable friend. But he was left out in the wheeling and the dealing that was being done in the weeks after it looked like the government would be formed.

The people of Clayfield still have the same questions that the financiers, the ratings agencies, the business community, those people looking for jobs, those people looking for certainty, those people looking for development in the state of Queensland have. Where are the plans? How is it going to be paid for? What is their strategy? What are they going to do? During the campaign there was no description of what was going to happen. There was no inkling from them about what they were going to do.

The Treasurer says that he had modest plans. The government members had very much to be modest about as well. They had little or no plan and they had little or no idea and they still have little or no idea. From what I understand is occurring, there is an ongoing turf warfare about which minister is getting which part of which departments and they still have not resolved it. The people who are poorer for it are the people of Queensland. So I say to the people of Clayfield: thank you for once again returning me to this place. Thank you for the opportunity to serve again and I look forward to holding this government to account over its stewardship of the state.

I want to reflect on a couple of comments that were made by the Premier in relation to the motion that has been moved today. I think it is important that we understand that this government does not have the unfettered or unqualified support of the people of Queensland. As the opposition leader pointed out, 37½ per cent of the primary vote can hardly be called an overwhelming endorsement of the policies. Indeed, it is clear that the LNP, with 41 per cent of the primary vote, was the first preference for the over 2.4 million voters in Queensland who took to the polls on Saturday, 31 January. Obviously, the member for Nicklin has made a choice and, of course, that is a choice that we respect and acknowledge and we understand the reasons for that choice being made. But that does not mean that this government is in any way, shape or form the endorsed government of the majority of people in terms of their first preference vote in Queensland. We need to keep that firmly in mind. I think the people of Queensland understood that when they voted the way they did. It is by no means the case that a protest vote gone wrong can be claimed to be an endorsement of Labor's policies. That is the certainly the case that we have here.

This is a government that comes to power with no commitment to a jobs target, a government that comes to power with an economic plan that flies in the face of almost all reasonable economic and business commentators and all sensible people, and a government that has no believable plan that is able to pay down debt. We are already seeing the government resile from its commitments. Government members are now starting to use the weasel words that many of the returning members started using only four or five years ago when they started down their program of saying one thing before an election and doing something completely different afterwards. So there can be no confidence in a government that behaves in such a way.

The Premier spoke about the need for doing things in a financially sound way. The previous government had already delivered a balanced budget outcome for 2015-16. It was going to achieve the fiscal surplus that Treasury recommended. I have heard a lot about the Treasury recommendations. The new Treasurer does not quite know what he wants to measure himself by. He does not know whether he wants to be measured by the operating surplus or the fiscal surplus. He is waiting for someone to tell him what to think about those sorts of things. He has admitted that already on radio. He did not admit it beforehand. But let me say what our incoming government brief was. The deputy opposition leader and shadow Treasurer has already referred to it. It stated—

Queensland's fiscal position and outlook is unsustainable and restoration must be an urgent priority for this term of government.

But the part that I do not think the shadow Treasurer mentioned is that, in the period from 2005-06 to 2010-11, general government expenses—and we know the Treasurer is very keen on talking about general government expenses—grew at almost double the rate of revenue. The main drivers of growth are employee expenses attributed to the number of employees and wages. Employee expenses increased by 40 per cent over the period 2004-05 to 2008-09 before the GFC. The numbers are important, because in 2007-08—

A government member interjected.

Mr NICHOLLS: It is before the GFC hit. Their expenses increased before the GFC hit. As the deputy opposition leader said, the debt has gone up, but over 2008-09 before the GFC. Expenditure on employee expenses—recurrent expenditure—was ballooning, as was capital expenditure ballooning before the GFC. So, quite clearly, the nonsense that is being proceeded with by those opposite that it was simply in response to the GFC is fallacious. In terms of proceeding forward, I think it will be very interesting to see how a Treasurer who does not know what it is he wants to measure himself by will end up adopting for his political purposes.

The Deputy Premier made mention of honouring promises. Already we are seeing a government that is not honouring its promises; a government that is backing away from its commitments. None more so than from what it claims to be its prime commitment—that is, in relation to dealing with government owned businesses and assets. As I have said, those opposite are already starting to use weasel words around major assets, strategic assets, property assets and those sorts of areas when before the election they made it clear they were not going to deal with any assets. Of course, that presents them with a problem because they cannot pay for it any other way.

The member for South Brisbane referred to employment and the unemployment rate. She referred to the unemployment rate under our government. As I always said in this place, unemployment is a scourge that needs to be addressed. But it is not the government that creates jobs; it is the private sector growing, expanding, vibrant, attracting investment, providing jobs, opportunities and training that is the engine room of employment growth not only in Queensland but throughout Australia. Unlike those opposite, who think the only way that they can get a job is by getting a job as a ministerial staffer or working as a union hack, we believe a job comes from a dynamic, vibrant and supported private sector. Despite their best efforts, in the last term of the last

Labor government what happened to the unemployment rate? It started at 3.5 per cent and increased by two per cent to 5.5 per cent. That is higher than any increase experienced by the LNP government between 2012 and 2015. In fact, in January of this year when the election was called, the unemployment rate had fallen to 6.5 per cent seasonally adjusted. It was tracking down at that stage.

Building Queensland is a flimsy, three-page document that spends most of its time having a crack at 1 William Street. It is a document long on vitriol and light on detail. We are six weeks into a government that was formed following the resignation of ministers on 14 February and we still do not have the name of anyone who is going to be on Building Queensland. Are those opposite still searching for someone to do what they want? Do they have any idea? Do they have any plan? By the same time of the previous Newman government we had implemented our seven-day plan and our 30-day plan. We had already set up the resources cabinet committee, the social services cabinet committee, if memory serves me we had set up the tourism cabinet committee and we were well on the way to setting up the property cabinet committee. We were a government that got on with the job. What do we see from Labor? We see 27 different attempts at deferring the problem and making it someone else's problem because those opposite have no plan themselves.

We heard a little bit about the appointment of people in a merit based selection process. I was hopeful that in terms of that process we would not see a return to some of the decisions that had been made previously by the Labor government. We saw 'Big Bill' Ludwig on the board of Racing Queensland; we saw the member for Brisbane Central on the board of Energex; we saw the former Labor Party president and Queensland Council of Unions general secretary Ron Monaghan on the board of Energex; and we saw John Battams on the board of Energex and the board of Skills Queensland as well. Who do we see on the board of the Port of Townsville? Tony Mooney and Tony McGrady. It was good to see Tony yesterday. We saw Ian Brusasco, the head and founder of Labor Holdings, on the board of Gladstone Ports Corporation; when the Bundaberg Port Authority existed, Owen Doogan, the current national president of the RTBU, was a board member, as was Cheryl Dorrin, three times failed Labor candidate for the federal seat of Hinkler. On Powerlink, Walter Threlfall from the ETU—of course he would be there—and on North Queensland Bulk Ports Corporation Jack Camp, a member of the ALP for over 30 years and an organiser with the Communications Electrical Plumbing Union, electrical division; Julie Bignell, the assistant secretary of Together, on the board of North Queensland Bulk Ports Corporation; Greg Simcoe, CS Energy; Rob Henricks, past state secretary and national president of the ETU—are we starting to get a theme here?—on the board of CS Energy; and on Skills Queensland, Andrew Dettmer, Ben Swan and John Battams. Why should we be surprised about that when federal government board appointments included Anna Bligh on the board of Medibank Private; Andrew Fraser, the former Queensland Treasurer, an Australian Sports Commission board member; Paul Lucas, former Queensland Deputy Premier, Airservices Australia board member; Desley Boyle, Telecommunications Universal Service Management Agency.

Mr Dick: The vindictiveness continues. The same SRCC chair. Very happy to do it.

Mr NICHOLLS: Hang on, I hear the member for Woodridge, Cameron Dick, former Queensland Attorney-General and Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission chair; and the member for Ashgrove, Landcare Council board member appointed in December 2012 and so on. Merit based appointments—we will believe it when we see it. Here is the challenge: if those opposite want merit based appointments why don't they appoint someone from the opposition to sit on the selection panel as well? Why don't they do that? It is good enough for them to do it for the CCC; why not do it for the heads of the great departments of state that they are so concerned about?

We can see that it is very difficult for any Queenslanders to reasonably have confidence in this government. It is very difficult indeed. A Labor campaign built on mistruths and fear, supported by a union scare campaign equally built on mistruths and fear—a campaign they are now trying to run in New South Wales this weekend to try to frighten people, an attempt to prey on people's fears and concerns rather than to provide a light for the future—is the campaign that led Labor to the position it is in in this House. A campaign that was relentlessly focused on the negative and put very few of the positives is the reason why Queenslanders can have no confidence that this government can deliver infrastructure. The only thing the Labor Party has delivered since this election is uncertainty: uncertainty about the status of projects that will attract billions of dollars in investment and thousands of jobs.

One of the very first acts of the incoming government following the election was the Deputy Premier proposing a ministerial call-in of the Cedar Woods development in Upper Kedron, a parcel of land that was originally earmarked for development by the previous Labor government, championed by the local government minister at the time, Andrew Fraser. It had gone through a council process. It was a development that had kept with the local plan, was supported by Labor in council and which

had been substantially mitigated by the developers during that process. The Deputy Premier does not call it in to ask what the problem with it is and why is it not going ahead; she calls it in to overrule a decision by a local authority. Local authorities can have no confidence in this government if what they see from the Deputy Premier is the first example of how the government decides to go on.

On top of that we have had the Premier voicing her concerns over the Queen's Wharf development, another thought bubble coming through that endangers about \$7 billion worth of investment and economic activity providing jobs to thousands of Queenslanders, including young Queenslanders being trained up in the vital areas of hospitality and tourism. What were the concerns? She could not say what they were at first and then she wanted to stay in that architectural exemplar of the Executive Building.

One can have no confidence in a government that operates with those thought bubbles. What did we do by contrast? We got on with the job of delivering major infrastructure. We put \$1 billion into the Bruce Highway upgrade; in conjunction with the federal government we put \$1.6 billion into the Toowoomba second range crossing; in conjunction with the federal government we put \$1.5 billion into the Gateway upgrade north project; we started building 10 new schools, the first of which has been delivered this year—we completed construction of the Highfields State School; we put \$460 million into the upgrade of the Bruce Highway just out of Gympie; we started the contract for the Sunshine Coast University Hospital—more hospital for less money; we also delivered the government wireless network worth \$450 million; and we put \$4.4 billion into the new generation rollingstock project to deliver 75 six-car trains—twice the cars for the same price that Labor was going to deliver them for.

What have we seen for small business? We have seen only the imposition of a greater tax. We were going to lift payroll tax, which would have benefited thousands of small businesses. What is Labor doing? Scrapping it! We see the same thing in trade. There is no additional funding for the trade office to support small business employment and the smart jobs that those over there talk about. Neither small business nor those in the trade exposed sector can have confidence in this government because of its actions. There is no way anyone can responsibly give this government the vote of confidence that it seeks today. It is not a responsible way to go. It is not supporting business. It is not supporting investment. It is not supporting infrastructure. It has no credible plan to pay down debt. It is not supporting trade. As I have said, it has no plan, no idea and increasingly, like the emperor, it has no clothes.