




Speech By  
**Steve Minnikin**

**MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH**

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**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

 **Mr MINNIKIN** (Chatsworth—LNP) (5.28 pm): As I stated in my inaugural speech, our role and responsibility as a government is to provide an opportunity deposit slip for all Queenslanders and not an entitlement chequebook. It is our responsibility as the government to be an enabler of opportunity, not a provider of assumed entitlement. To stand here in this august chamber and give my address-in-reply after being re-elected for a third term by the people of Chatsworth is indeed a true honour and one that I do not take for granted. I fully realise that it is a privilege and not a right to serve in this chamber. I am truly indebted to the people of Chatsworth, and I thank them for giving me the opportunity of serving as their state member in this, the 56th Parliament.

Just as I did in my inaugural speech just over six years ago, I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today, the Jagera and Turrbal peoples. I again reaffirm my allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and to her representative, His Excellency the Governor Paul de Jersey, the institution of parliament and of course the electors of Chatsworth, who have entrusted me for the third term of electoral representation in this parliament.

I have been asked by some why I reaffirm my loyalty to Her Majesty, and my response is simple. I have no doubt there will be an Australian citizen as our head of state one day, but whenever the republican debate gathers a head of steam and various models are put forward I am yet to find a model that has all the safeguards and protections that our current constitutional monarchy system offers. I also believe that the level of public service given to the Commonwealth by Queen Elizabeth II is without compare and she is truly a remarkable woman.

Even though I am giving this speech nearly 12 months since the last election, I take this opportunity to once again thank defeated and retiring members of the 55th Parliament for their valuable contributions, and I congratulate all returning and new members of this 56th Parliament. The nature of politics dictates that individuals come and go, but of particular note was the outstanding contribution to public service in this great state by the former member for Southern Downs, the Hon. Lawrence Springborg. He is a man of the highest integrity and decency. Lawrence Springborg epitomised all that is great about serving in public office and all that is great about people who have the rare trait of being respected in equal measure on both sides of the chamber. I wish him well with the next chapter of his life.

I remain steadfastly committed to doing what is best for the Chatsworth electorate, which I am proud to serve. Whilst I am deeply honoured to be the shadow minister for transport and main roads, as I repeatedly say, the most important initials or title one can have as a politician are MP. Without them you are not a minister, shadow minister, whip or anything else.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Stewart): Members, there is far too much chatter in the chamber. Take it outside or keep your mouths closed.

**Mr MINNIKIN:** It reinforces the notion in my mind that serving your local community as an MP is always the highest priority. Nothing has changed. Since first being elected in 2012, my passion to make the local community I represent a better place in which to live will continue to be the focus of what drives me each and every day as a parliamentarian.

I again listened with keen interest to the Governor's opening speech on 14 February outlining the Palaszczuk government's agenda for this 56th Parliament. I read with interest the section dealing with the government's Debt Action Plan, which stated—

My Government will continue its careful management of our state's finances and economy as well as continuing to deliver surpluses and lower general government debt.

What a joke! We know that a few months later the budget handed down by the incompetent Treasurer showed \$83 billion of total government non-financial public sector borrowings over the four-year forward estimates. To be specific, table 2 on page 6 of Budget Paper No. 2 shows a figure of \$83.093 billion.

Being asked by the Leader of the Opposition last year to take on the role of shadow minister for transport and main roads was a real privilege. This portfolio is crucial to the livability and economy of our great state. While it has challenges, it certainly has plenty of opportunities. The transport sector is also a diverse one. Operators who provide goods and services to the community range from family businesses to multinational companies. I have made it my business to meet as many of these people as possible including bus operators; taxi, rideshare and limo drivers; heavy vehicle operators; road and bridge contractors; and train crew and toll road operators, to name some of the incredible people who are helping to make this state great.

During my trips to regional Queensland it is always a feature of my visit to meet with local representatives to make sure that I learn about their concerns and aspirations as I travel across this vast state. I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to these people who have taken me into their confidence, shared their concerns, and helped me understand how best I can better assist them. While I will always strive to remain positive with regard to the responsibilities of my role, there are clearly times when the government needs to be held to account for their performance. I will not shirk from this responsibility, whether I am fighting for better public transport services or road upgrades or trying to secure a better deal for motorists such as toll road incentives and real-time fuel price monitoring.

While seeking to improve processing times for transport operators I will maintain a problem-solving attitude along with a relentless approach to keep the Palaszczuk Labor government focused on delivering on their transport and main road commitments. This is no less than the people who elected me expect, and I will not let them down. In terms of holding the Labor government—and in particular the Minister for Transport and Main Roads—to account, unfortunately there have been plenty of occasions to point out where they are short-changing the good people of Queensland. 21 October was the second anniversary of Labor's rail fail, when Queensland Rail commuters had 427 services cut from the timetable each and every week. Despite two years of ongoing sagas and more than \$160 million in additional costs to try and fix this train wreck, in a recent ABC interview the transport minister was still unable to even offer an informed guess as to when these services might be restored.

While it is widely recognised that more train drivers are required as part of the solution, the minister has allowed the Rail Tram & Bus Union to maintain a 'closed shop' approach to driver recruitment and training. This confirms that the Labor government is completely captured by the unions. It is ruled for the unions and by them. The hand-picked consultant who undertook the commission of inquiry into Queensland Rail's train crewing practices, and who was subsequently appointed chair of Queensland Rail, resigned in September after the bonus payments fiasco for Queensland Rail executives, as did two other QR board members. I am unsure whether 'KPI' stands for 'keep public inconvenience' or 'keep public ill informed'.

In 2017 Signals Passed at Danger, SPADs, were at the highest number for almost a decade, and there were apparently no sanctions against drivers for this dangerous behaviour. This is appalling, and the minister needs to do whatever is necessary to address this issue. Public safety should always be of paramount importance. Despite falling productivity, as measured by driver plate time, drivers and guards received pay increases and bonus payments even for just turning up for work. Some drivers earned in excess of \$180,000 per annum, including overtime. While the union is extracting more from Queensland Rail, it is delivering less for commuters. Average sick leave for drivers continued to climb to 12 days of unscheduled leave each year. There are constant delays on the Sunshine Coast line and a \$230 million shortfall in matching funding for the Sunshine Coast rail duplication. The Cleveland line is now referred to as the 'misery line'.

To make the performance stats appear better, on-time running is calculated on a vastly reduced timetable. They are still questionable and they do not reflect the true situation. How can the minister look at people with a straight face and talk about on-time running, when New Generation Rollingstock is not even included and trains simply bypass stations in order to make up for lost time. Rather than taking responsibility for the debacle the minister continues to deflect blame for the lack of drivers onto the previous LNP government. This is their second term and, in any event, no-one was sacked by the LNP. Some staff took advantage of voluntary early retirements. The old playbook of blaming the previous LNP administration was a complete furphy anyway, as we had the best on-time running performance data of any Australian passenger network.

Despite the transport minister harping on about the reduction in actual driver training time, it has still taken 13 months to train new drivers. As at this month there has only been a net increase of 47 fully qualified drivers since the Strachan inquiry in 2016. Of course, the transport minister seems to have a new figure each time he speaks. Overall patronage of public transport has flatlined over the past four years and has not kept pace with population growth. Furthermore, at the estimates hearing the minister appeared unaware that emergency bus services contracts had to be issued to South-East Queensland's major bus operators to keep them operating while the TMR department continued to struggle with New Generation contracts. The statements made by the minister and the Queensland Bus Industry Council are at odds. Based on credibility I know whom I would believe given the private mangocube email scandal, which is still ongoing. South-East Queensland congestion is a major problem. According to the RACQ surveys, peak-hour traffic speeds have plunged and urgent action is needed to bust worsening congestion.

The Labor government's \$9 billion infrastructure underspend over the past three years has led to Queensland racing for the economic wooden spoon, recording some of the combined worst economic growth and unemployment rates in the country. Under Labor, car registration costs have gone up by twice the inflation rate over the past three years—3½ per cent index rate—placing further burden on motorists already suffering under record petrol prices. Queensland car registration costs are too high. Queensland remains among the most expensive states in which to register a vehicle. It has the highest registration costs in Australia for six- and eight-cylinder vehicles.

Outstanding debts under SPER have climbed to \$1.2 billion. A fraction of this money could form the state's contribution to the duplication of the Sunshine Coast rail line. The lack of proactive management of infringements at TMR prompted comment from the Queensland Audit Office in February this year about the unnecessary delays at TMR before finally passing them along to SPER for enforcement action. The Audit Office also recommended that TMR reviews the tolling framework in conjunction with the toll operator Transurban and the State Penalties Enforcement Registry to better manage the ballooning tolling debts. Under this Minister for Transport and Main Roads motorists are not encouraged to make greater use of the existing toll roads as they are too costly, with no incentives, thereby adding to congestion across the network.

Speed camera fines are set to increase by 11½ per cent from last year, to \$446 million. This leads to the question of whether these devices are being deployed for genuine road safety, which of course the minister will state is the case, or mere revenue raising. My role as the shadow minister for transport and main roads is to hold this minister to account. I intend to do just that.

Other issues I intend to pursue during the 56th Parliament include Commonwealth-state financial relations and competitive federalism. This incessant, ridiculous blame game between federal and state governments, especially in the key areas of health, transport, infrastructure and education, is beyond a joke. As I have previously stated in this House, urgent reform of our constitutional responsibilities is paramount. I was extremely disappointed following the decision not to proceed with the federal government white paper on this area of vital public policy. As Alan Fenna states in *A People's Federation* at pages 134 and 135—

The high degree of vertical fiscal imbalance (VFI) in Australian Federalism gives the Commonwealth enormous power to intervene at will in the many areas of jurisdiction assigned by the Constitution to the states ... Australia's current fiscal arrangements obscure lines of accountability substantially.

Vertical fiscal imbalance and the duplication of service delivery across the three tiers of government are holding this nation back. The sooner this debate is top and centre of national dialogue, the better. I will speak further on this issue in future speeches.

All politics is local, as other members have said. I will continue to fight hard for the constituents of the Chatsworth electorate and look to improve amenities at various schools in my electorate. I will continue to lobby the education minister to support my recent local petition for air conditioning at the junior campus at Camp Hill State Infants and Primary School.

As I continually acknowledge, there is one aspect of being a politician that unites all of us in this chamber, regardless of our various ideological beliefs. None of us can aspire to high office without the help and wonderful support that we get from important people in our lives. I would like to make some callouts. To the local LNP branch members: thank you for your dedication and professionalism during the last state campaign. As in previous elections, there were several days during the state campaign back in November when the mercury was rising and the weather was particularly hot and uncomfortable, but my dedicated support team continued to hit the pavement and letterbox-dropped targeted areas of the electorate.

Unlike the paid employees of the Transport Workers Union, money can never buy the human spirit. To the many supporters, both from within the Liberal National Party and personal friends, who assisted with the pre-poll in the weeks leading up to election day I offer my deepest thanks. I

acknowledge Matt, Mike, Drewe, Kerri, Ken, Paul, Hayden, Steven, Greg, Kev and many others. I also again acknowledge the numerous supporters throughout the Chatsworth electorate who enabled me to erect signs along their front yards and fences.

My mother, Denise, was again exceptional in her support throughout the entire campaign, particularly rising to the occasion with prepolling. My love for her knows no bounds. Contrary to popular stereotypes, the support I received throughout the campaign from my mother-in-law, Corina, was also incredible. I thank her from the bottom of my heart, particularly for her sterling efforts during prepoll.

As was the case several years ago when I first ran for preselection, my greatest support base is my immediate family. My two sons, Harrison and Lachlan, worked tirelessly around their university, school and sporting commitments to assist with my campaign. For the third election in a row, I was full of pride and overwhelmed by their work ethic and dedication during the campaign. However, nothing politically will ever surpass my pride in watching them grow up into becoming fine, free-spirited and thinking young men. As I have felt since the moment I laid eyes upon them when they were born, I would give up my life for them in a heartbeat.

Six years ago in my inaugural speech I described my wife, Roslyn, as my rock of Gibraltar. Politically, everything I have achieved as a member of parliament could only ever have been done with the support and assistance of my wife of over a quarter of a century. Roz has been magnificent. She has done a phenomenal job, not just throughout the campaign but also throughout the course of my political career. My success in being elected for a third term is due in no small part to her efforts. Roz, I thank you again from the bottom of my heart.

I have previously stated that our ideological battles here in this hallowed chamber are an important part of the overall democratic process—of course they are—and robust debate is an important part of this, but, as the approximately 1,200 names on the honour board of past members of the Legislative Assembly attests, our time here in this chamber is, relatively speaking, pretty short as a proportion of our overall life experiences. Therefore, I believe it is incumbent upon all of us to use our privileged time here responsibly, in pursuing tangible outcomes for the electorates we are privileged to serve.

In closing, I dedicate my third address-in-reply speech to the memory of two former members for Chatsworth. Mr Bill Hewitt was a source of great political wisdom to me. He passed away during the last term of parliament. If I can be half the politician this gentleman was, I will leave my time in state parliament very satisfied indeed. The Hon. Terry Mackenroth was the member for Chatsworth for 28 years. Whilst we were divided by political ideology, we were united by our love for the Chatsworth electorate. His years of public service are testament to this fact.

I am truly honoured to be returned for a third term as the state member for Chatsworth. I have previously quoted Hal Colebatch, who stated that the high privilege of democracy cannot be maintained unless the equally exalted responsibilities attracting to it are understood and observed. If I can indelibly change just one person's life in just one small way by serving as a member of parliament, it will be worth it. I will continue to serve the people of the Chatsworth electorate to the best of my ability, knowing it is indeed a real privilege and one I will never, ever take for granted.