




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (4.54 pm): Budgets are important. Budgets are an opportunity. Despite an increasing ambivalence towards budgets by the media and the general public—they would rather perhaps see the outcome of the State of Origin, understandably; they might like to see something else—they remain fundamental to the business of this place. Budgets remain fundamental to the business of this state. Indeed, the whole reason we have parliaments is to scrutinise the expenditure by government. That was the reason they came about.

I have to say that I had hoped that the new Treasurer of this government would bring some understanding, some life and some passion back to this most important aspect of government. It is the setting out of the government's economic and fiscal plan for the next 12 months, at the very least, and for the term of this government given that it is just the beginning of a two-year-and-10-month term.

Sadly, I was disappointed. I suppose I was as disappointed as the previous treasurer who might have felt somewhat aggrieved. His hard work—and it is hard work preparing budgets—was not even recognised. There was not one word. There was not a mention. I thought in 2017 the lack of mention by everyone else apart from the then treasurer of his budget was bad, but this year we have seen it carried on to a higher level. The member for South Brisbane, the Treasurer, did not even do the former treasurer, the now Speaker and member for Mulgrave, the courtesy of acknowledging the work that he had put in during the last three years, even though all of those budgets were dismal failures. She did not even do him the courtesy of recognising that. There was not a word of thanks for his efforts.

Now we have the fourth Palaszczuk Labor budget. I am disappointed that it is the fourth Labor budget. I had hoped it would be different, but that is not to be. That is the way our system operates. The fourth budget, brought down by the member for South Brisbane, has again been described—we have heard this ad nauseam—as a typical Labor budget. How many times have I heard that phrase used to describe a lacklustre document that has no plan, no idea and no hope for a secure economic future? This is such a typical Labor budget that even the Treasurer could only devote just over 20 minutes to extolling its virtues. That is how typical this Labor budget is.

What could we expect? We read stories about the member for South Brisbane—about her passion and how she is a dedicated, social activist and that she was going to bring this to the Treasury portfolio. We were expecting more vim, more vigour, more enthusiasm. What did we see—nada, blah, bland, nothing. What did we hear or, more importantly, what did we not hear? We never heard anything about coal. We did not hear about mining. We did not hear about debt. We did not hear about a fiscal balance. We did not hear about taxes. We did hear about broken promises. We certainly did not hear any new ideas. There were no new ideas.

It has been my great misfortune to have to endure too many Labor budgets I am sad to say. Last Tuesday I heard it all again. I was reminded of the failure of the Labor Treasurer's hero and idol Anna Bligh. Others may wish to forget, but I remember that government and I remember its budgets. I

remember the member for Inala, the member for Woodridge, the member for Cooper, the member for Sandgate and the member for Macalister were all part of that government that rightfully got turfed out in 2012. I remember the member for Miller. I remember him when he was part of a Labor council that got turfed out in 2004 as well—a man so game he did not even want to go back. He took eight years off. He went to find himself. I remember them all.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms McMillan): Order! I ask you to return to the long title of the bill please.

Mr NICHOLLS: Others, as I say, may wish to forget but I remember. I remember that government and I remember what they did. What had they done? They had gone bust in a boom. They had frittered away the best terms of trade that this nation had seen at a time when our resources could not be pulled out of the ground fast enough, at a time when the price we were getting for those resources could not have been higher—more than \$300 a tonne for coal. What did that government do? They went bust in a boom. They spent it all. They lost Queensland's prized AAA credit rating. They started borrowing at unsustainable rates. Let me be a little clearer, as I quote from a very good budget speech in 2012 from someone who had a bit more vim and vigour in those days. Under the heading 'Fixing our Finances', they state—

... Labor had a fire sale of assets, abolished the fuel subsidy—

Do members remember that?

Mr BAILEY: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. As fascinating as 2012 is and the member's speaking notes from the time, this is the 2018 budget. I ask him to come back to the budget that is before the House.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: I ask the member to return to the bill.

Mr NICHOLLS: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am discussing the budget. I am discussing the economic plan. As the member for Woodridge, the member for Cooper and I think even the member for Stretton have all talked spoken about past budgets and about past activities of the LNP government, I would think that this is exactly on point. They continue—

and made buying the family home up to \$7000 more expensive—

Do members remember they abolished the stamp duty concession on buying the family home—\$7,000? They increased tolls by 30 per cent on all of the motorways throughout Queensland and also made Queensland the most expensive state in Australia to register and run a motor vehicle.

What were we told when we came to government? This has been raised. This is what the Queensland Treasury government brief said—there are those who might remember—

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

What did the Queensland Treasury Corporation say? They said—

The State's debt has reached unprecedented levels. Together with its published forward estimates showing an even greater volume of debt required, Queensland is now in uncharted waters with respect to the volume of debt on issue and the resultant interest bill.

We had the Commission of Audit. The government is very keen to point out that it was headed up by Peter Costello, as it was, but they seem to skip over the fact that it was also headed up by Dr Doug McTaggart, the head of the Queensland Investment Corporation under Labor, and Professor Sandra Harding, the Chancellor of James Cook University. It was not a one-man show; it was all three of them. They conveniently forget that. They said—

The magnitude of the task is substantially larger than previously recognised because the former Government has built in unrealistically optimistic Budget assumptions that have masked the magnitude of the underlying structural problems.

What else happened? Who else said something about it? Here is an article I managed to dig up about what we faced after coming to government—'For Labor ex-minister, a time of atonement', by Tony Moore, 30 July 2012. What does this luminary say? Here is a quote from the article—

As we worked through the interview, he described how he felt the party should have concentrated more on the economy during the election campaign, emphasising the decisions it had made.

"I do think Labor fell into the error, or seriously miscalculated and under-estimated the desire for Queenslanders to hold onto the AAA credit rating," he said.

"And I think the concern Queenslanders had generally about government debt and deficit."

"And I think we were unable to effectively tell our story ...

Who was the luminary who said that? Tony Moore had rung a few people. It is interesting that prior to those quotes he said—

Most felt it was not yet time to speak publicly.

But not this former Labor luminary. Who was it? It was the member for Woodridge. What a surprise! Never short of a word is the member for Woodridge. We remember him well.

What are we seeing in this latest incarnation of a budget? We are seeing the complete abrogation of responsibility by an innumerate Premier and an economically reckless Treasurer. We are seeing five new taxes—four slipped in under the cover of an advertising blackout period during the last election and a new waste tax justified under many guises and excuses but we all know that it is simply because Labor cannot manage its finances. Expenses grow exponentially and this government ignores its own fiscal principles. What is the result? It is debt and deficit. What is so important about fiscal deficits? They mean more debt. More debt is just a tax on future generations. It has to be paid. There is no other way. It has to be paid.

The Leader of the Opposition has clearly outlined a plan for a better Queensland under an LNP government—a clear plan, with clear priorities and clear commitments. The shadow Treasurer has outlined the failings of this budget. While that is not as difficult a task as it might otherwise be, I comprehensively applaud both of them for their work and their speeches outlining the issues here this morning.

We will hear much from those opposite that we on this side will complain that not enough is being spent on projects while not saying where the money will come from and opposing tax grabs in this budget. They will say that. They always do. Let me say this: they are not mutually dependent. Better spending of the funds that are already granted to us by taxpayers can still deliver the services and infrastructure this great state needs. It requires a lot of hard work. It requires discipline but it can be done. It just cannot be done by Labor—not with a government in thrall to the union movement, with ministers who have inappropriate backchannel communications, who cannot or will not act in the best interests of Queenslanders but rather in the interests of their union mates.

Fundamentally, this budget highlights in the starkest terms the fundamental difference between our side of the House and those opposite. They think that they can tax and borrow the state into financial prosperity, save families money and deliver services. We know they cannot. We know it is individuals, freed of the shackles of the state, who receive reward for effort, who are not taxed every time they are successful, who are not subject to the politics of envy who will truly drive growth, jobs and prosperity for the future.

In the short time I have left I want to deal with a couple more issues. One not dealt with in this budget is to do with the parity of pay for front-line therapy staff. This would have been the appropriate time to deal with that. I declare my interest. My wife is an occupational therapist. She works in Education Queensland with disabled children and has done so for 25 years—a great group of people who work with those kids in our state education system. I have seen what they do. There is a significant pay disparity between OTs employed by Education Queensland and those employed by the Department of Health. In year 8 for a qualified therapist—not just OTs but physios, speech therapists and others—it amounts to almost \$20,000 worth of difference between someone employed in the education department and someone employed in the health department doing exactly the same job with exactly the same qualifications. This has been raised with the minister, who has done nothing about it. This budget would have been the ideal time to do something about it.

In Clayfield, the difference in spending is quite stark. There is a more than 25 per cent decrease in spending for Brisbane north compared to the last LNP government. In my own electorate, the schools continue to receive the rough end of the pineapple from this government. In fact, there is no funding for the Kedron State High School performance hall, which is a sorely needed requirement for a school with almost 1,600 students.

We have seen a miserly amount of funds for some school classrooms and a pool upgrade. The Kedron State High School Performing Arts Centre is the No. 1 priority for that school. In fact, the only thing in relation to education that Labor has done in my electorate is close the Pinkenba State School. That is the only thing they have managed to do. Traffic congestion remains.

This budget disappoints in all critical respects. It was an opportunity for the new Treasurer to set out a pathway forward. It was an opportunity to show what this government plans for the future of this great state. It is my misfortune to see yet another typical lazy Labor budget.