




Speech By
James Lister

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL (NO. 2); APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 2)

 **Mr LISTER** (Southern Downs—LNP) (4.01 pm): I rise to speak in the cognate debate. On behalf of my constituents in Southern Downs, I have to say this is yet another example of Labor's economic mismanagement. The people in my electorate expect to see a government that runs a tight ship, one that spends its money wisely and does it in a way that delivers the services that they need. As I did some adding up before this debate I was interested to see that, whilst this bill is for just short of \$1.4 billion, over the last five years of the Labor government we are looking at \$4.56 billion in additional expenditures that have been authorised in this way. If we compare that to the three years of the previous government, the 2012-13 to 2014-15 financial years, there was only \$523 million. We understand that there can be natural disasters and other unforeseen events, but one would expect around about half a billion dollars over three years. It is remarkable that the government is unable to tighten its belt. It is unable to constrain its spending and what it is spending on are things that Queenslanders do not want or need.

I note that in the 2018-19 budget the Treasurer introduced five new taxes totalling \$2.2 billion. There has been a total of nine new or increased taxes over the five-year period of this Labor government, ripping \$3.5 billion out of the economy. Let me give a lesson to the Labor Party on this: you do not make society better by taxing it. People who make money the hard way, who are trying to make a living, spend their money a lot better than the government does. When I look at some of the priorities that this government has it is really quite a disgrace. We have seen record spending in so many areas yet we are seeing increases in waiting lists for hospitals, we are seeing increased ramping, we are seeing the renaming of hospitals, the reversal of privatisation of prisons—which was \$111 million or so—and a \$45 million bike track to link some Labor electorates in Brisbane. With \$45 million we could fix the Gore Highway in my electorate of Southern Downs.

When there is economic mismanagement on the part of the government, those who are hurt are everyday Queenslanders who find it harder to get a job, who have to pay more for rego—more for everything—because of this millstone of an inefficient and bloated government hanging around their necks. We have terrible unemployment in this state and that is the direct result of the mismanagement and indebtedness of this government.

Turning to the Auditor-General's report, it was a scathing indictment of the economic management of this state. No wonder the government has been so reluctant to talk about it. No wonder it did not respond when the Auditor-General provided it with advance copies seeking feedback. I was happy to read an article by Des Houghton in the *Courier-Mail* on Saturday. Uncle Des knows a thing or two! He says—

The government finances are a basket case, with Auditor-General Brendan Worrall warning this week that government debt is still spinning out of control, with spending outstripping revenue.

The government ought to listen to that—spending is outstripping revenue. It might be news to them, but everybody out on the streets of Queensland knows that debt is climbing and climbing. We are on our way to \$100 billion, which will indebt my kids, my grandkids, their kids and their grandkids.

When the state spends more than it earns ultimately the debt becomes the problem of the people of Queensland. Spending like drunken sailors might be what the Labor party loves to do but it is not something they should be proud of and it is not in the interests of the people of Queensland. Des Houghton also said—

Worrall also warned a 'significant factor' in the rising debt crisis was the growth in the number of public servants. A stacking of the public service with card-carrying unionists is the new Joke, the term applied to government wrongdoing by the Fitzgerald Inquiry ...

There are now 233,673 public servants thanks to Labor's featherbedding.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr LISTER: Des Houghton continues—

Queensland now spends more on public sector employees per capita than any other state.

The public servants become milk cows of the union, with millions in union fees channelled to the ALP. Yet despite the extra staff, such as teachers and nurses, service delivery worsens in key areas including health, education and policing.

He raises a very good point. It is interesting that with so many more nurses and doctors—as the member for Logan was interjecting—patient waiting lists are rising, ambulance ramping is going up and people are waiting years for important surgery. It is about outcomes. At the end of the day the government exists to provide services to Queenslanders and the way to measure that is whether the people are getting those services or not. In the case of health we are clearly in crisis. We have a government that spends like a drunken sailor but delivers nothing. If the members of the government have a problem with that I suggest they walk down the street and ask people what they think of the health service. The people know this health system is in crisis and it is up to the government to fix it. I do not know if they will. I hope the LNP gets an opportunity to do so after the next election.

It is instructive to hear the government talk about asset sales. I rejoice in the opportunity, whenever I can, to remind the government of its asset sales—the assets that it sold as distinct from those which had been proposed by the previous LNP government. The Labor Party never put them to the people. I see ministers sitting on the treasury benches who were sitting around the cabinet table when there were extraordinary asset sales. We have seen about \$16 billion in asset sales by the Labor Party. Where has all the money gone? We know where it has gone. It has been blown. It has been frittered away on thought bubbles and projects such as \$100,000 on weight loss for dogs, reversing the privatisation of prisons and the renaming of hospitals. Even after raiding the superannuation of public servants the government still has rising debt. The member for Chatsworth made the very pithy observation that the trouble with socialism is that eventually you run out of other people's money. That is exactly what is happening here.

We hear the state government constantly whingeing about the federal government not coming to bail them out. Is it any wonder? If I was looking from the outside into this state government I would say, 'Why would we cut them a blank cheque when they spend their money so badly?' The problem with this state government is that when crises arise, such as an international pandemic or a natural disaster, it cannot deal with them when it is swimming in debt.

That is what they are: they are swimming in debt. They have been a profligate, ineffective government that is inward looking and whose members are far too concerned about their own jobs. I thought it was particularly instructive the other day when I saw in the media that the Premier advised her members to 'focus on your own jobs, don't worry about everyone else's jobs'. That is exactly the problem: they are focused on their own jobs—all the jobs to my left—and are not thinking about the jobs of Queenslanders.

The best way to have low unemployment and an economy that will generate enough taxes to support police, hospitals and schools is to have a strong economy. You cannot have a strong economy when you are swimming in debt, when your spending and borrowing priorities are appalling and when you discourage private investment with a myriad of red tape, which has been the hallmark of this government over the past five years. In saying that, I know confidently that I speak for the overwhelming majority of the people in my electorate of Southern Downs who look down at Brisbane from our country seat and see a city that is serving itself with a city-centric government that takes the stick to the bush, does not spend enough on infrastructure—

Mr Power interjected.

Mr LISTER: I take the interjection from my honourable friend the member for Logan. Emu Swamp Dam is a very good example. There is \$47 million on the table from the federal government and it has been there for the past 12 months or more. The growers themselves have put \$23.4 million on the table in the past 12 months.

Mr McDonald: It's a great project.

Mr LISTER: It is a great project; I take that interjection from my honourable friend the member for Lockyer. The thing about Emu Swamp Dam is that it cannot be built without the state approvals or the state's share of \$13.6 million. Isn't it instructive that the government typically wants to race forward and claim credit for announcing something such as the Emu Swamp Dam, but it is very slow to pay up and it plays the village idiot when it comes to allowing the approvals. It wants it to stop, just as we saw with the black-throated finch and the cartoonistically ridiculous attempts to waylay a project that will provide 700 jobs in my community. That is a huge number of jobs for a community on the Granite Belt. When the Labor Party wants to talk about jobs, good economic management and building infrastructure, it is all nonsense, it is soft soap, it is just weasel words and Emu Swamp Dam in my electorate is a perfect example of just that.