




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) (2020-2021) BILL

APPROPRIATION (2020-2021) BILL

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (10.32 am): I rise to speak on the 2020-21 government appropriation bills. These post-election budget blowout bills are exactly what I expected from this debt dependent, fiscal failure of a Labor government, unfortunately re-elected on the back of a totally unrelated scare campaign over health. In fact, I was so confident the government would use the coronavirus excuse to further blow out Queensland debt in this budget, I predicted it would be \$130 billion even before the Treasurer's announcement. I knew that he would not miss the opportunity to rack up more borrowings on the Queensland taxpayers' credit card whilst using the excuse of the coronavirus to hide Labor's insatiable appetite for more Queensland debt, even to pay recurrent expenditure—never mind the fact that Labor had racked up \$102 billion worth of debt before the coronavirus hit town. In the old Labor adage 'you never let a chance go by', so they could not resist the opportunity of a good excuse to whack more debt burden on the shoulders of Queensland's children and their grandchildren which I cannot foresee will be paid down in the near future.

We are all at the start of a world economic downturn and Australia is at the tip of the tail of the dog in world economic terms. Queenslanders, brace yourself for tough times ahead. This budget has the usual Labor Party mantra about hiring more public servants to hide their private sector failings, as evidenced by their top-of-the-pops rating as having the highest unemployment of all mainland states. How embarrassing for a Labor government! Our state has bountiful resources being extracted from the ground; Australia's favourite tourist destinations, as evidenced by the opening of the borders; unrivalled agricultural product; and a booming migration level fuelling construction across the state, yet we have the ignominy of the highest unemployment in mainland Australia, presided over by a Queensland Labor government.

The numbers will get worse. The state government shut the borders relentlessly while they knew the Morrison federal government was paying for their election pitch of keeping the borders closed through JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments amounting to billions of dollars. That pea and thimble trick will cease next year and then the real cost of keeping the borders closed will be sheeted home to this government. I know that they will buck and squeal about Morrison keeping the payments up, but the reality is that these 'on the dole' payments will have to stop sometime. When they do, this sleight of hand budget will be exposed for the mirage that it really is.

You can guarantee that over the next four years the debt level will be creeping upwards from the \$130 billion promise we have today. The only hindrance to a Labor Party all-out assault on maximising the credit card debt will be an independent ratings agency bold enough to downgrade the fiscal position of this government again, as in the Bligh-Andrew Fraser era.

Coming into another election which will be all about the economy will sound the death knell for any treasurer aspiring to be the premier when—not if—the current Premier takes her leave of parliamentary duties. I can remember former premier Peter Beattie walking across the floor of this

chamber, turning to those on this side of the House and saying, 'If it was up to you guys, I would be here for 100 years.' But Labor shifts them on, and the audition is for the member of the AWU faction, Treasurer Cameron Dick, trying to get his way through. We welcome him as the alternative Premier, I can assure you!

I am pleased, on behalf of the Mermaid Beach electorate and the people of the Gold Coast, that some funding—some—has been included for M1 upgrades and there is seed funding for the Coomera Connector which is much overdue. The \$10 million for exit 41, the \$5 million for exit 49, the \$12 million for the Coomera Connector and the \$6 million for exit 57 are all just bandaid solutions for a problem that will reach parking-lot status by the time another four years has gone by. Instead, some of the \$5,400 million designated for the ex-treasurer's underground railway pet project in South Brisbane should be transferred to get the Coomera Connector well and truly underway rather than spend beer money, in road-building terms, on fiddling with a few crossings.

I note also that \$50 million is allocated this year for light rail stage 3, which is 85 per cent in my electorate; however, a lot more money is required to finish this. This drip-feed approach to most of the projects for the Gold Coast indicates how short of money this government really is. There are plenty of promises, but most have over four years of funding and utilise federal government money allocated to Queensland as part of the spend, with little acknowledgement that it actually comes from the federal government.

I am also appreciative of the \$10 million for the sports centre to be built at Miami State High School, a great school with a great headmistress/principal—whatever you call them these days. Again, funding is over four years. That epitomises the drip-feed approach to getting jobs done in Queensland.

A curious omission from the budget is money set aside to pursue the global tourism hub the Labor government trumpeted for the Gold Coast in the lead-up to the election. It was always a furphy, even before the coronavirus hit town. For the Palaszczuk government to walk away from the Star casino's offer of a \$100 million extension to the Gold Coast convention centre in return for a 20-year exclusivity deal for the Gold Coast operation was sheer madness and incompetence.

I note that there is no money for the convention centre extension in this year's budget. I am sure there will be no new alternative casino operator in the next 20 years. Why on earth did this foolish Labor government walk away from a \$100 million contribution from the private sector for one of the most important tourism infrastructure projects on the Gold Coast? I bet Star casino will now not be stumping up their \$100 million as they know that after the coronavirus pandemic has hit the world, there is no need to pay for their exclusivity for 20 years as there will be no competitor on the Gold Coast for another 20 years.

It is an absolutely rolled-gold opportunity lost by the Palaszczuk government. It is no wonder they have one measly seat out of 11 on the Gold Coast, where people recognise their disdain for the private sector capital of Queensland called the Gold Coast. I noticed Senator Murray Watt, one of the rejects from this parliament—I think it was Murray who when we had him in here; normally we get the rejects from the Senate in here not the other way around, sorry, Minister—

Mr Fumer interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Order! Member for Mermaid Beach, please direct your comments through the chair.

Mr STEVENS: I apologise, Mr Deputy Speaker. Senator Murray Watt was moved down to the Gold Coast and made a spectacular effort in trying to garner a few more votes for the Labor Party using his federal moneys down there, but he failed miserably. We have 10 out of 11 seats—'Hear, hear' for the wonderful Gold Coast.

Another year of Labor, another budget blowout and \$26,000 of debt placed on every man, woman and child in Queensland and yet no-one seems to care. We can see the drip-feed method of paying for infrastructure. The Labor Party obviously did not want the big headline of record debt prior to the 31 October election, but to be honest I do not think it would have made any difference to the election result as the election was totally about the health scare. The Labor government did not care one iota about the financial cost of the shut businesses because ScoMo and the federal government were paying for the pain through JobKeeper and JobSeeker. There was relatively no financial pain for the state government but a hell of a lot of electoral gain from scaring aged people nightly on the news and in the papers in the morning with coronavirus statistics from all around the world.

The Premier and the Chief Health Officer were the reality TV stars on free-to-air television and they rode the disaster politics all the way to the finishing post on election night. Now we have this debt-laden budget foisted upon Queenslanders, ostensibly on the back of the COVID excuse. Premier Palaszczuk has been blessed by this pandemic. One could legitimately ask: could the Labor Party have won government without coronavirus? This budget tells us it could not.

The Treasurer ran around the state with his propaganda document of Unite and Recover pinned to his suit under his arm. I am sure there were blank pages behind the glossy front page because this budget will recover nothing for Queenslanders. Perhaps he should have called it the 'unite and cover-up' document because the debt burden, the drip-feed for infrastructure and the borrowings for recurrent expenditure will undoubtedly be exposed in the years ahead when the Morrison government takes Australian businesses off their dole payments of JobKeeper and JobSeeker. That is not to mention our tension with China—Queensland's biggest trading partner. My friends in the wine industry are suffering already. I am doing my bit to catch up. If China takes a big stick to our resources industry then Queensland will end up borrowing just to pay the interest bill.

The Treasurer did not know Queensland's debt level—hello. He did not know we had a budget booked in for April—hello. He certainly does not know the pain of small business caused by his government's restrictions that his parents' small business would have rammed home to him. As a treasurer, the member for Woodridge makes a great attorney-general for Tuvalu!

Fiscal knowledge and responsibility will be the centre of the next election in 2024. In February, when we sit again, it will only be three years and nine months until the election. Coronavirus will be a dim, dark memory as the world utilises the myriad vaccines that are coming to the fore very quickly. When jobless rates start to rise to double digits, when the scarcity of money drives interest rates up around the world and when this Labor government runs out of credit capacity, the people of Queensland will realise how they have been hoodwinked into returning this fiscally irresponsible and incompetent government to the treasury benches. They will not make the same mistake twice. Barring earthquakes, floods, fires or other disasters—and flies—that Labor needs to rely on, 2024 will be all about the budget and this pretend Treasurer with kindergarten financial credentials, who will probably be Premier by then, will reap the rejection by the people of Queensland of his making.

If I may digress momentarily, I advise the House of the recent passing of a great Queenslander and close mate of mine for 40 years. Dr Michael Joseph Barry—Mick, to everyone who knew him—passed away in the surf at his beloved Currumbin on 6 November aged 78 years. Mick was Australian Wallaby No. 542, a respected ear, nose and throat specialist, a great family man and a doyen of the Tugun-Currumbin area. We shared ownership of several successful racehorses. He was a board member of the Gold Coast Turf Club and honorary doctor for the club for many years. A memorial and wake was held for Mick at the Gold Coast Turf Club last Friday where many of his friends and family celebrated his generous, joyful and fun-loving personality with loving reminiscence. Vale, Mick Barry, physically gone but never forgotten. A great mate.