




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

Record of Proceedings, 3 December 2020

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) (2020-2021) BILL

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 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (9.22 pm): In the almost year and a half since the last Labor budget was delivered in this place much has changed, but much is still the same. Of course, front and centre has been the coronavirus pandemic. COVID-19 has changed how we work, how we play, how our children learn, how we shop, where we can travel and even how we talk. Corona is no longer just a beer or, for those more astrally minded, the highest level of the atmosphere around the sun, and iso is now the word of the year here in Australia.

Economies around the world went into freefall as governments reacted to the health crisis by introducing restrictions on the movement of goods and people. Stocks and share prices went into freefall. Many businesses closed, some unfortunately forever. Some will come back. Many will emerge much smaller than when the pandemic was declared and some will emerge stronger and larger.

Here in Queensland a budget originally promised for April and then abandoned and then revived has now, under pressure from the LNP, finally been delivered. They did not want to deliver one. They ducked it, avoided it. They ran like Wile E Coyote trying to get away from it all, but finally they were forced to deliver a budget. I have to wonder why because I have no doubt that the member for Woodridge, the former member for Greenslopes, was under no impression when he looked in the mirror of his ability to deliver one. He thought, 'No, this is my great opportunity. That fellow from Murrumba—I am going to beat him in the leadership stakes. I am going to stand up and do as well as I can.' He saw his opportunity and he leapt at it.

After the member for South Brisbane, of course, was involuntarily retired to the backbench, the member for Woodridge saw his chance. Labor's third Treasurer in three years continues to borrow big just to keep the lights on and to cover the failures of the last five years. No matter how much has changed—and a lot has changed in that year and a half, including the Treasurer—Labor budgets and Labor treasurers do not change their spots.

Every year that I have been in this place Labor governments have increased debt—every year—even in the best of times. In 2007 debt increased, more than doubling from the previous year. In February 2009, of course, Queensland's AAA credit rating was lost under Labor despite almost a decade of the best economic growth and the best terms of trade in Australia in half a century. Despite the rivers of gold delivered by a booming resources industry, Labor still could not manage finances.

When the GFC hit and having gone bust in a boom with no gas left in the tank to battle the financial crisis what did Labor do? In direct contravention of promises made before the 2009 election, they sold off Queensland Rail, Forestry Plantations Queensland, Queensland Motorways, the Port of Abbot Point, their investment in the Brisbane Airport Corporation and a host of other things that they wanted to get out of. There was \$15 billion worth of sales and guess what?

Mr Power: Strong Choices came next?

Mr NICHOLLS: The debt still went up. I say to the member for Logan they blew it all; it is all gone. The member for Logan asks the question. He says, 'Tell us what you did?' Let me tell him what we did. There was \$300 million for schools' maintenance that had not been spent by the Labor government. We got rid of the dental long waiting list that had not been dealt with by the Labor government. There was the great schools guarantee, \$600 million handed over to schools and school communities so they could deliver the programs they wanted. There was exit 54, a \$65 million upgrade on the M1 and Labor never had a look in the door. There was \$8 billion on the Bruce Highway upgrade with the federal government, \$1 billion on the Gateway Upgrade North—and we got the federal government over the line on that one—the second range crossing, \$1.6 billion which Labor never, ever had a chance of doing.

Let's talk about the ramping at hospitals that was reduced. While we are on the subject of the ramping at hospitals, let's talk about the nurses and the doctors and the wardsmen who actually got paid after Labor could not pay them the right amount. They paid dead people or they did not pay them enough or they paid them too little. It was a health department that was sclerotic under Labor and about whom Anna Bligh said, 'I want to take a meat axe to it.' That is what Labor left us.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr NICHOLLS: Hang on, there is more, member for Logan. Ask me another question. There was the Sunshine Coast University Hospital, \$1.4 billion; Gold Coast Light Rail; the recovery from Yasi; recovery from ex-Tropical Cyclone Oswald; we cut down the bikies—the member would know about that—and then we delivered tradesmen's works for local tradies so they could deliver in the regions. There are the Get in the Game grants so that kids could play sport without going broke, the great start home buyers grant—where was that ever delivered by those opposite? By the way, we introduced the first home owner's stamp duty grant as well, which was cut by a Labor government. We handed management of local water schemes from SunWater back to local irrigators.

There is also Queen's Wharf, and I bet they will all be wanting to go down to Queen's Wharf at some stage. They would still be waiting if not for an LNP government. They talk about it; we deliver. We delivered payroll tax concessions, the first in a decade; full funding of emergency services so our fireys and ambulance services in times of disaster can respond. They are fully funded by us. The NDIS agreement was signed and entered into by the LNP government. There was the inquiry into child safety—and boy, we could almost use another one of those now after the failures of this government—and the extra \$460 million that went into it; and the inquiry into domestic violence, ignored by Labor for so long and delivered by an LNP government.

The review into Trade and Investment Queensland would have become nothing more than a glorified travel agency for Labor ministers to go overseas and was costing tens of millions of dollars more. Who can forget the lease that they signed in Los Angeles at three times the going market rate?

We stopped the crazy Cross River Rail plan that was going to cost more than \$12 billion and we investigated the new rail plan, which this government is now using as the basis for its design.

Mr POWER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. None of this has been relevant to this budget. This has all been a lovely trip into history, but there has been no mention of the cuts to the Mount Lindesay Highway, bus services or the Barrett centre. It has nothing to do with this budget.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Walker): There is no point of order.

Mr NICHOLLS: I was just taking the member for Logan's interjection. If he does not want to hear anymore, he ought not interject anymore.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Order! The member for Logan will cease his interjections.

Mr NICHOLLS: If the member for Logan were half as good as his predecessor, Mr Mickel, rather than just some flaky failure who sort of fell into the position, he would realise that, on page 166, the general government sector time series covers all expenditures and revenues from 2008 and 2009. Not only was I taking his interjection; it is actually in the budget papers. When they coined the phrase 'Come in, sucker', they were thinking of the member for Logan.

Mr Power interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Pause the clock. Member for Clayfield—

Mr NICHOLLS: I withdraw the unparliamentary language, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Logan, you will cease your interjections or you will be warned.

Mr NICHOLLS: What else did Labor do in the lead-up to an election campaign in 2009? It is relevant because we have seen the same behaviour this time around. The Fuel Excise Subsidy Scheme was axed—no-one was told about that—and petrol prices went up by 9.1 cents per litre; tolls were increased by 30 per cent; and, in another hit on motorists, registration fees were lifted to become the highest in Australia. With the Labor Party's crazy green agenda, they do not want people owning cars—

Mrs D'ATH: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance. We are not debating the 2009 budget; we are debating the 2020-21 budget.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Mr NICHOLLS: Given what I have endured for the last couple of years in somewhat stoic silence about budgets going back to 2012, I have to say that the preciousness of those opposite is somewhat amusing but not unexpected. They can give it, but they certainly cannot take it. They have neither the wit nor the memory—nor the ability—to do so.

The Labor Party did not want people to own a car—tolls were up, fuel was up and registration was up—but then if you wanted to catch public transport, guess what? Public transport fares went up as well—25 per cent a year each year for three years. Who was the minister responsible? It was the member for Inala, who sat there and meekly went along with whatever was said in relation to it. There would be no cars and train prices were going up. By the way, you were lucky to get a train that ran anyway. Who can remember all of those trains that could not run? Remember the million dollars in fare rebates they had to offer because all the trains stopped working? That was after two years of trying to get the go card to work. They could not do that, either. Then what happened? The then Labor treasurer wrote to the Australian Energy Regulator effectively asking for power prices, locking in five years of increases from 2010 to 2015.

Mr Brown interjected.

Mr NICHOLLS: No. The member for Capalaba displays ignorance. It was more than 45 per cent because there were two years under Labor that it went up above CPI. It was much higher. Andrew Fraser wrote to the Australian Energy Regulator and said, 'We're not making enough money. We're going bust. We have to charge more for it. Please increase the distribution charges.' That is not to mention the waste in the Tugun recycling plant!

Time is getting away from me, as much as I enjoy it. There are things I could go on with—the rail failures of the Labor government. They delayed New Generation Rollingstock for so long that Downer EDI pulled out of the contract. They said, 'No, we cannot build them.' Who was the member for Whitsunday at the time? Jan Jarratt, the then member for Whitsunday, came in here and sheepishly handed out a media release saying, 'Oh sorry, we cannot build them anymore; Downer EDI have withdrawn,' three weeks after the then member for Hervey Bay, Ted Sorensen, asked her if it was still going ahead. This is only beaten by Rachel Nolan, who when asked directly whether there were any plans to sell Queensland Rail said no and then three minutes later Andrew Fraser got up and said, 'We are selling Queensland Rail.' It would be a comedy if it were not so tragic.

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Pause the clock. Members, there is far too much noise. I understand that the member for Clayfield is being provocative. Please keep the noise down or I will start warning people.

Mr NICHOLLS: And not deliberately provocative, Mr Deputy Speaker, as I am sure you will appreciate. From 2012, the LNP government had to start getting things under control. The rate of increase in debt was tackled. The hopelessly optimistic revenue forecasts were amended to reflect the fact that Labor had overestimated revenue by \$4½ billion. We achieved the smallest fiscal deficit since 2006 in 2013-14 and, as we projected, a fiscal surplus was achieved by former treasurer Pitt in 2016-17 on the back of our strategy. Ever since, fiscal deficits have been the hallmark of Labor treasurers. The worst coming are from the bloke who thinks he is the best.

Mr Mellish interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Aspley, you are warned under the standing orders.

Mr NICHOLLS: It is his second term; he is finding his voice after three years of saying nothing. I am prepared to forgive him. I thought he was working on computers for the first two years that he was here!

These papers show a government with no fiscal plan, a budget in a shambles, its third Treasurer in three years, its third Under Treasurer in three years, its sixth debt repayment plan. Like all the previous debt replacement plans it is not to be believed, because you know what? Debt will be \$130 billion. When I hear the word 'myth' I think of my old friend with his Mythbusters. I wish I had

another 15 minutes to speak, because there is so much good information about what Labor did in the Mythbusters from that time. We know of taxes going up and so on. When I heard the Treasurer say, 'It is a myth that all debt and deficit is bad,' I reflected on what he said after he lost office in 2012 as the member for Greenslopes. He said—

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

and—

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

The member has been on the road to Damascus—well, the Logan Motorway to Woodridge—and has turned around and decided to borrow and spend. A budget with \$28 billion in borrowings over four years was not taken to the Queensland people before the election. Some clever word games, stagnant net worth and the breaching of their own fiscal principles, all without a credible plan, is not a budget; it is Labor history repeating itself. That is not a plan that any shopkeeper I know would willingly sign up to.

(Time expired)