




Speech By
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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (11.42 am): I rise to speak on the appropriation bills. As a member of the Economics and Governance Committee, normally I would be afforded 20 minutes to speak on these bills. Appropriation bills are among the most important bills that come before us. They should be scrutinised. Unfortunately, because these bills have not been scrutinised, I have less time to speak on them.

What is an appropriation bill? It is the government's plan for how it will spend the money of the people of Queensland. This government has shamefully hidden that plan from the people in whose pockets it has its hands. Imagine that you were in a bit of financial difficulty at home. You go to your boss and you say, 'Boss, I've decided that you are going to give me a pay rise. This is how much the pay rise will be. I understand that I need this money because I have been wasting money and I have not put anything aside for a rainy day. I have not been cautious with my spending. Look, all of that might be my fault, but what needs to happen now is that you need to pay me extra money.' I think the boss would likely say, 'What exactly is it for?' The people of Queensland should be asking, what exactly is this money for? That would be our normal process. But in this case the government is saying, 'I'd love to tell you, but that's a secret. I don't want to discuss that. You just give me the extra money. That's how it's going to work.' That is where we have arrived at with this bill.

The government has guillotined debate in this place. It has used commercial-in-confidence to hide many things, including how much we paid for the AFL to come to Queensland. It will be a great celebration, but how much did we pay? The people of Queensland should know that and the same goes for other celebrity events that we are hosting. But they are hiding not just that. Now they are hiding what they are doing with the money generally. Where is it going? In this place scrutiny around both legislation and, in particular, finances is becoming an embarrassment to the democracy of Queensland. The fourth estate should be holding this government to account and there are some who are. However, there are others who are looking for jobs, because they know that their colleagues are being paid very well to spin-doctor the Premier's latest media thought. We find ourselves in a situation where the parliament is being controlled. It is being dictated terms. Debate is being curtailed. Supply is being demanded without explanation. We have a parliament where the ministerial budget is out of control. We are a long way from what the Fitzgerald inquiry recommended as a balance, which was to make sure that the opposition is well resourced to do its job.

Let us look at how we have arrived here. There have been 11,287 days since the 1989 election when Goss came to power. As at 31 October 2020, 9,376 of those days will have been under a Labor government and 1,908 of those days will have been under a coalition government. Labour will have been in office for five times longer and yet somehow everything that is wrong with Queensland is our fault. It is the LNP's fault. That is what Labor would have us believe. That then begs the question: if you

have been in power five times longer than the other side of politics, you must be incompetent or useless if you are unable to manage the economy. The question then becomes: are you incompetent, are you useless or are you hiding the truth from the people of Queensland?

Mr FURNER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I am reasonably patient, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I ask you to bring the speaker back to the bill on relevance. We do not need a history lesson here today.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Member for Toowoomba North, these types of debates generally do allow for very wide latitude. I will continue to allow that, but I will also continue to listen carefully to your contribution. I would like to see it being somewhat relevant to the purpose of this debate.

Mr WATTS: I can understand why those on the other side would not want to have a discussion about how the Queensland budget has come to be in such a mess. However, these appropriation bills directly relate to that mess, which was created over the 9,376 days that Labor has been in government. That is the first point.

The next point is that these appropriation bills relate to the sneakiness of this government. They relate to their sneakiness in taking money off taxpayers while saying, 'But we don't want to discuss it.' They could be up-front and say that they have some issues and that they need the money to run government—we all know that. They could say, 'This is what the tax is for. This is what we will take the money for. This is what we will do with the money.' Instead, like a pickpocket in the middle of night, they walk up to you as you are walking through town and put their hand in your pocket and grab your money, and they will not discuss how they will spend that money. They want to hide that from the people of Queensland obviously because they are embarrassed. Labor, I can understand, should be embarrassed. The premier at the time said—

The simple fact is that we have a \$14 billion hole in our budget bottom line caused by the worst global recession in our lifetime.

That was a statement trying to bring some fear into the 2009 election by the then Labor premier. Shortly after the election, even though she denied it before the election, she put her hand in the pockets of the people of Queensland and withdrew the fuel subsidy. This allowed them to collect an extra \$2.4 billion over four years, but the budget was still in trouble. What did Labor do? Let's have a look at the record over the 9,376 days.

They sold Sun Retail for \$1.2 billion. I wonder what it is worth today. They sold Sun Gas for \$75 million. I wonder what it would be worth today. I wonder if these budget appropriations are there to buy it back at some new inflated price. Powerdirect was sold for \$1.2 billion. Golden Casket was sold for \$530 million. I wonder if there is a plan to buy back these assets that were sold by Labor. Is there a plan to buy the gas assets and Entertrade, sold for \$268 million? I bet it is worth more than \$268 million now. Wind energy assets were sold for \$460 million. I have looked through the papers but I cannot see it there. I am not sure if they are planning on buying it back, or if it would be worth more or less than it was sold for by Labor. The Brisbane Airport, probably doing it pretty tough now, was sold for \$289 million. I wonder what it would be worth now. I wonder if these appropriations are to buy it back. I have not seen what they are for, so it would be very difficult to know. The Cairns Airport was sold. Who sold the assets in Queensland? The Labor government sold the assets in Queensland. The Cairns and Mackay airports were sold for \$738 million. I wonder what they are worth today, even in the middle of a global pandemic.

Our Premier today becomes a member of cabinet. She would not sell assets, would she? I am not sure if she is planning to buy them back with the money out of this Appropriation Bill. The forestry plantations sold for \$600 million. The Premier is sitting at the cabinet table. Is the plan to buy them back with this appropriation? The Port of Brisbane was sold for \$2.1 billion. I wonder what it is worth today. I wonder how much of this appropriation would be required to purchase it back today.

'Queensland Rail is not for sale.' We have been told and lectured, 'Don't listen to what they say; look at what they do.' These are the facts of what was done. Queensland Rail was not for sale. Now it is gone! It was sold for \$4 billion. I wonder what it would be worth today. I wonder if these appropriation bills are here to purchase it back. We read media speculation that Abbot Point might be a great investment because coal is going to be required for decades to come. It was sold, when Annastacia Palaszczuk was sitting at the cabinet table, for \$1.8 billion. Government members have the hide to come in here and talk about selling assets. We know who sold the assets because it is firmly recorded by history. I wonder if these appropriations will be used to purchase them back at a greater price than the people of Queensland sold them for under Labor in the first place.

We hear a lot about the road network and the lack of investment in the road network. What happened to the \$3 billion Labor received from selling Queensland Motorways? Was it reinvested in a second M1? Oh, no, that is right: it was used to pay down debt—sorry, no, that is right, debt went up as these assets were sold.

This Appropriation Bill is a sham. It is a pickpocket in the middle of the night with his hand in the pockets of Queensland taxpayers at the time they can least afford it. The government is putting its hand in and saying, 'Nothing to see here. Look over there. We need a distraction over there. We will put on an AFL grand final so you are not watching closely while I take your money and spend it as I please and potentially sell your assets while I am doing it. I promise I will not do that, but don't listen to what I say; look at what I do.' That is what happened. That is the history of Queensland. I can understand that the member for Ferny Grove would not like that history. I would be embarrassed, too, if I was the member for Ferny Grove.

What do we see here? Instead of 1,000 pages explaining carefully the investment plan that will be made on behalf of the people of Queensland, this government is lurching and infighting as it prepares for an election, squandering its money on making sure everybody knows the slogan that will be used in the campaign. It is not calling for a long election campaign. We heard yesterday that postal ballots will happen early, but we will not be in caretaker mode. People will be able to apply for their postal vote and we are not even in caretaker mode. The Premier could make it a longer election campaign, but 'No, I want to grasp onto power.'

This government is interested in protecting the ruling elite. It does not want scrutiny of its legislation in this place. It does not want scrutiny of its financials by the people of Queensland. We were elected to be the opposition. Our job is to make sure that the voices of the Queensland people are heard in this place, yet we are silenced, gagged and guillotined by this government. Our job is to make sure that when the government sneaks up behind the people of Queensland in the middle of the night and lifts their wallet out of their back pocket we are there to check what they are going to do with the money. However, we are not able to do that because the power of this arrogant ruling Labor elite is preventing this parliament from doing its job. The government should be ashamed.

I remember when there were going to be 14 ministers opposite us here because they were going to save a fortune for the people of Queensland. It did not last long. 'Don't look at what they say; look at what they do.' They are the words that have been spoken and these are the facts.

Some 9,376 days of Labor government versus 1,907 days of a coalition government—that is how we got in this mess. Secrecy, deceit, hiding, lack of scrutiny and lack of due process will not fix Queensland. The only thing that will fix Queensland is a party that has some vision, a party that has a desire to get Queensland working again, a party that wants to supercharge the regions, a party that wants to make sure Queensland is safe for our children and a party that wants to invest in growth. We should not be investing money in assets that are not going to give us a decent return, save some social infrastructure that we definitely need such as the Toowoomba hospital. We need to make sure that taxpayers' money is spent carefully.

The best way to ensure it will be spent carefully is to use the disinfectant of sunlight on the elite as they try to pick the pockets of the people of Queensland. That is what is required in this place. That is what the Labor government are afraid of. That is what they do not want to have. They do not want to have scrutiny. They do not want to have a debate. They do not want to discuss their legislation. They want to hijack this process so that they can retain power, and they will make the people of Queensland pay for it. That is what this Labor government would do. That is what they have done and that is what they will continue to do. I believe that the people of Queensland will not be hoodwinked by this government's fear campaign.

We rightly should be concerned about the health pandemic, but that is not a reason to not have a vision and a future for our children here in Queensland. That is not a reason to corrupt the process of this parliament. That is not a reason to bring legislation in here, make it urgent and not have the scrutiny. We all knew when the election was going to be held. We have known it all year. There was no reason for this process to be rushed.

I am sure that the Treasurer, as incompetent as he is, would have known that they were going to need to procure some more money, so it would not have been difficult for him to bring this appropriation bill forward earlier and have the proper scrutiny and let the people of Queensland know and understand how their money is going to be spent and what this government is going to do. That is not the nature of this government. They want to hide, they want to deceive, they want to grasp onto power, they want to reward their mates and they want to go and have pictures taken with celebrities, but they do not want to look after people who are ill or dying or look after families who are separated. That is not what they want to do. Shame on them!