




Speech By
Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

Record of Proceedings, 18 June 2021

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

 **Mr POWELL** (Glass House—LNP) (12.10 pm): This morning we reflected on the life of a true Queensland great, Sir Llew Edwards, the former Liberal member for Ipswich—yes, you heard me right—health minister, treasurer and deputy premier. We heard how he epitomised classic Liberal values and principles. We heard how he used those values, principles, his intellect and talent to deliver for his community of Ipswich and for Queensland and Australia, including as the chair of Expo 88. We heard how he stood up to those who opposed his values, how he debated the issues and even challenged others in his own government.

When I joined this parliament over 12 years ago I knew I was joining an LNP team that included men and women of Sir Llew's ilk and I knew I was throwing myself against some great minds who, while misguided, were the best representatives of what the ALP believed in. They were individuals who endeavoured to live out the words of Ben Chifley when he said—

We have a great objective—the light on the hill—which we aim to reach by working the betterment of mankind not only here but anywhere we may give a helping hand.

This was the intellect that I thought I would face on entering parliament. Unfortunately, what we have today in the Queensland ALP is such a shallow reflection of this great legacy. While I fiercely reject many of the policy positions of the Australian Labor Party, there is a legacy in the ALP that deserves better than what they are seeing. This budget shows that the current version of the Labor Party is such an anaemic interpretation of true leadership and true vision that it leads to no other feeling than pity for those who still blindly believe the Labor mantra because of one simple fact. The current Queensland Labor government have taken vision and turned it into one of the most pathetic and disgraceful stains on our democracy: political spin. They have not treated Queenslanders with enough respect to say, 'This is what we hope to do.' Instead, they have used trickery and deceit. Instead of being honest and laying out the truth, they have used bureaucratic gobbledygook. They have listened to the spin doctors, the quiet backroom boys, and they are endeavouring to completely hoodwink the people of Queensland.

Just over three weeks ago I rose to speak to the so-called Debt Reduction and Savings Bill. I referred to it as a work of fiction. I spoke about how the Palaszczuk Labor government were trying to con the people of Queensland. They are at it again with this budget but on a far grander scale. A centre point of their budget is the bogus sale of the land titles office. When you sell your house in Queensland it is the land titles office that facilitates the transfer to the new owner. You pay a fee for that, a fee that goes into the state coffers. Several weeks ago in the Debt Reduction and Savings Bill we were told the government were transferring ownership of the land titles office from themselves to themselves for an anticipated value of \$4.1 billion.

I spoke about how I wanted to get in touch with whoever had done that valuation because when you compare it to the leasing of the New South Wales titles office for \$2.6 billion and in Victoria for \$2.85 billion—offices that are based on far larger populations and would be considered far more valuable—\$4.1 billion sounded like a jolly good deal. Plenty of my constituents would want to know who the Palaszczuk government's valuer was because that could hardly be described as a conservative valuation. Overpriced was probably more apt.

Little did we know that not content with \$4.1 billion, the Treasurer went in search of a better offer, a better offer at which to sell the land titles office to himself, and lo and behold he found it: a whopping \$7.8 billion. If it sounds too good to be true, it is probably because it is. By moving the land titles office from one form of government ownership to another at a price of \$7.8 billion all of a sudden the Treasurer's balance sheet looks healthier than it really is by supposedly wiping debt from the books. However, no money has changed hands. I say that again: no money has actually changed hands. It might meet modern accounting standards—just—but, to be honest, if a private corporation tried this trick, their directors would be in an awful lot of strife.

Sadly, the political spin, the fiction, the trickery does not end there. Firstly, the sham sale was designed to reduce the government's debt figure, but it has not actually reduced the level of debt each Queenslander must repay. It has simply moved the debt sideways, not down. Secondly, this \$7.8 billion transfer was supposedly meant to free up a whole lot of capital to invest in a range of funds. There was the Hospital Building Fund, a \$2 billion fund intended to build the hospitals Queensland desperately needs. There is the Housing Investment Fund, \$1 billion to build the social housing our working homeless and most disadvantaged are crying out for. There is the Carbon Reduction Investment Fund with \$500 million for land restoration; the Path to Treaty Fund, \$300 million to finance the government's work on reconciliation; and the Renewable Energy and Hydrogen Jobs Fund, overall \$2 billion to assist the government owned energy corporations to increase their ownership of commercial renewable energy and hydrogen projects.

I do not know about you, Mr Deputy Speaker, but when I hear the word 'fund' I hear money. In business, the term 'fund' refers to the pool of financial resources available for near-term use. The organisation's funds include cash on hand—of course—available for immediate use but also other liquid assets that will become cash in the near term as needed. If people saw the word 'fund' they would expect to see something in it, a dollar figure or, in the case of a budget over four years, an indication that money was going to come into it in the near term.

Here is another sham: these funds are political spin, scams, shams, swindles, tricks, frauds and hoaxes. Over the next four years how much will actually be in the Hospital Building Fund? Not the \$2 billion promised, not \$1 billion, not even \$1 million; there will be nothing, zero, nip, nada. In the supposed \$1 billion Housing Investment Fund, nothing; in the Carbon Reduction Investment Fund, again nothing; in the Path to Treaty Fund, nothing. I will be fair, the government did set aside \$500 million for the Renewable Energy and Hydrogen Jobs Fund and there was already \$500 million in there, but that still leaves the sum of \$1 billion outstanding.

Queensland, do not be conned. This government is not going to build new hospitals from this fund. This government is not going to build new social housing from this fund. This government is not going to restore land from this fund. This budget is not what the Treasurer, the Premier or the government say it is. It will not end our ambulance ramping and health crisis. It will not stem the debt. It will not work, in the words of Ben Chifley, for the betterment of mankind. It will not even build the infrastructure we need in Glass House, let alone across the Moreton Bay and Sunshine Coast regions, or indeed across the state.

In fact, the government has cut \$4 billion from infrastructure over the course of this budget. The amount of \$1 billion equates to about 10,000 infrastructure jobs. That is the equivalent of 40,000 jobs that have gone begging or, more likely, gone to New South Wales at a time when we need to invest in transport and road infrastructure. We have a burgeoning population, particularly in the region I represent, that is desperate for a better, shorter, easier commute. If we are to host the Olympics in 2032, we need to catch up and get ahead fast when it comes to infrastructure investment.

Everything mentioned in this budget for the Glass House electorate is either already underway or nearly completed—or in some cases already finished. These are projects like the resurfacing and road widening on the D'Aguilar Highway; the traffic lights at Beerwah State School; the new Maleny Fire and Emergency Services complex; the Bruce Highway upgrades, which, by the way, were 80 per cent funded by the federal government—thank you, Scott Morrison; the widening of Steve Irwin Way—again, with federal government investment; and the north coast rail duplication—again, with federal government investment.

All of these projects are needed, but all have been announced multiple times already. There is nothing planned. There is no vision. There is nothing new. The government has not even brought forward the funding for the much needed Maleny Kenilworth Road upgrade at Cambroon. It is still not slated to commence until 2023-24. There is nothing for Mount Mee Road at Ocean View, for lights at the intersection of Campbells Pocket Road and the D'Aguilar Highway at Wamuran, for Maleny Kenilworth Road at Witta or for the Maleny Hydrotherapy Centre. There was no mention of a review of the school transport system sought by the parents of students from places like Ocean View, Mount Mee, Delaneys Creek, Peachester and many other locations not only around Glass House but also around the entire state.

This budget demonstrates that terms such as 'light on the hill' do not belong to those opposite anymore. They have not lived up to that promise. They have not lived up to that dream, to that vision. When they use words like 'XYZ fund' and do not actually fund the fund, they show that they have abandoned these ideals in the name of cronyism, trickery, personal ambition and political spin. By the way, in Ben Chifley's speech, when he spoke about the light on the hill and vision, he followed with a warning and said—

If it were not for that, the Labor movement would not be worth fighting for.

It is clear: Chifley's warning has come to pass. In contrast, a Crisafulli LNP government will deliver transparency, services, a strong economy and jobs. It will deliver on the true legacy of the great visionaries of our political past—something this Labor government cannot.