



Speech By
Ray Stevens


MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

Record of Proceedings, 23 June 2022

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (4.47 pm): Labor's greenie mates will be happy with this budget. This is the best recycling budget in the history of Queensland. By 'recycling' I mean reannouncing projects from previous years' budgets. I rise to voice my absolute disgust at a budget bill deliberately designed to deceive and extort Queenslanders by an out-of-touch and incompetent Treasurer leading Queenslanders down a fiscal path laden with more debt, higher taxes and a grim future for our children and our children's children for many years to come. As the debt of \$26,000 on the head of every man, woman and child in Queensland is further pumped up by a Labor government not concerned with financial reality but totally consumed by increasing the membership of unions through the Public Service, Queensland's precarious debt position will become blatantly clear this financial year, with inflation skyrocketing and the necessary corollary of interest rates rising, which will impact severely on every Queenslanders and every Queensland business operator.

Who is the state Labor government going to blame now that their favourite excuse for failure—Scott Morrison—is no longer in Canberra? Increased taxes, fees and charges are the hallmarks of a Labor government scrounging every dollar they can out of everyday Queenslanders, when Queenslanders are facing their toughest time for many years through the cost-of-living pressures brought out by exorbitant fuel prices, soaring food prices and, worst of all, skyrocketing energy prices because of bad planning and policy by a Palaszczuk Labor government more interested in spin and a media headline than in putting in place reliable and cheap energy provision for Queenslanders to stay warm and keep the lights on.

All we get in the promotions of this budget by Premier Palaszczuk is, 'It's a record spend on health.' Any idiot would know that it is a record spend on health every year, including in the LNP's time in government, because of the growth in population and the increase in population growth health demands. That chant by the Premier tells everyone that she does not have anything to sell in this budget except bad news.

There is nothing in this budget as to how her government will address the ambulance ramping rife in all Queensland hospitals. People's lives have been lost due to the slowness of ambulance response times because ambulances are sitting in a queue in hospitals loaded with patients waiting for a bed. The queues are getting longer than the taxi ranks in Surfers Paradise on a Friday night. The same old COVID excuse is trotted out, along with lack of more federal government money when clearly the buck stops with the Palaszczuk state Labor government and their shemozzle of organisation of hospitals, insisting union membership, bureaucrat, paper-shuffling, administration staff take priority over

frontline doctors and nurses and more beds. Clearly these union Labor puppets on the other side of the House put a higher priority on signing up union memberships than they do on fixing the problems of ambulance ramping and blowouts in the waiting lists for elective surgery.

The big headline splash about fixing the health system with more hospitals and more beds is another Palaszczuk government red herring. When one analyses these so-called big spends one will notice they are all now estimated over six years. The forward estimates of spending have always only been over four years. Again we have a Labor government fudging and manipulating the budgetary figures to give the impression they are addressing the health crisis in Queensland under their watch. It will not be too long now and we will again get the Anna Bligh catchcry that the Queensland Health system is a basket case and we need to split it in two. More spin, deceit, manipulation and downright dishonesty on the people of Queensland and yet the ambulance ramping, long elective surgery waiting lists and physical pain endured by Queenslanders tells the real story of the health crisis in Queensland.

To hear the transport minister crowing about the brand new projects of Cross River Rail and Gold Coast Light Rail stage 3 tells everyone he does not have anything new to fix skyrocketing traffic congestion, in particular on the Gold Coast to Brisbane commute. These are projects announced years ago and to try to spin the media that these are brand new commitments is an insult to the media's intelligence and certainly will not wash with their viewers and readership audience. The Premier needs to sack her 19 media advisers if that is the best they can come up with to try to spin the fourth estate. They have lifted the cap on employing more public servants—aka more union members—and no doubt Queensland's recurrent employment expenditure will balloon over the year ahead as they try to keep the unemployment figure down by employing more public servants. Eight thousand new public servants next year, with another \$2 billion whacked on the government's annual wage bill tells you this government does not care about efficiency and fiscal responsibility, only more union members.

Again funding for the alternative M1 from Brisbane to the Gold Coast has been put on a drip-feed with the Coomera Connector now reduced from six lanes, as a highway should have, to four lanes which is a suburban regional road capacity. This government has no interest in the thousands of M1 commuters caught up in everyday traffic jams, four-hour delays because of accidents on an already overcapacity road or just plain fixing a problem—

Mr Bailey interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lister): Member for Miller, your interjections are not being taken.

Mr STEVENS:—that is as obvious as the nose on your face for commuters between Australia's third largest city and Australia's sixth largest city. With the Olympic Games just 10 years away this drip-feed approach of funding small sections of cosmetic solutions for the M1 is a total sham and an embarrassment for a government out of innovative ideas, as their former leader Peter Beattie said, and, even worse, out of Queensland taxpayers money to fund proper solutions to fix Queensland's road suffocating problems.

Only a week ago Queenslanders were advised to minimise their power use to avoid citywide blackouts—this from a state government that exports most of Australia's power generating coal to China and other overseas countries returning royalties of around \$6 billion to this year's budget bottom line. Bad policy, media spin renewable commitments and a ridiculous gouging of wholesale generation prices to prop up their floundering, debt-ridden budget are the hallmarks of this government's inability to operate fiscally responsibly.

When I look at the budget papers and see the fraudulent large letter writing of a pretend government commitment of \$1.2 billion for light rail stage 3 through my electorate—I notice the minister will be listening to this—I note the small print writing that the government commitment this year is only \$270 million with the rest coming from the private sector, the federal government and the Gold Coast City Council. We, the public, are not privy to the real Queensland taxpayer expenditure because of cabinet confidentiality to hide the true position of this government on the matter, but I am reliably told the extra \$270 million is to cover union demanded best practice wage blowouts that the contractors, Hollands, were not prepared to cop. Again, the union puppets on the other side of this House are dancing to their union factional masters' string pulling to the great detriment of Queensland taxpayers and the financial efficiency of building infrastructure in Queensland.

Guess what, Mr Deputy Speaker, the Treasurer's promise that there will be no new taxes in this budget we now know to be as hollow and as fraudulent as his hollow promise that he has no interest in being Premier when the current red-carpet-addicted Premier finally checks out of her gig on her massive defined benefits superannuation, letting her retire from politics on a \$300,000-a-year pension.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Lister): Pause the clock. Members, the level of interjections is too high.

Mr STEVENS: Plus there will probably be a nice soft landing for her as well with a cushy job as trade commissioner in London or LA to put some greenback icing on top of her pension and to continue her frolicking with movie stars and glitterati in Hollywood on the real red carpet.

This budget contains three new taxes hitting up three vital employers in this state that will create more unemployment, rising cost-of-living pressures and put more pressure on our vital small business sector, which is obviously the biggest employment sector in Queensland. The Treasurer proudly boasts that he is the son of a small business operator. He should know that any increased costs through taxes will be passed onto the consumer through the retail price that the consumer will pay. No businessperson in the world is going to suck up an attack on their bottom line profit to appease a profligate and incompetent Queensland Labor state government milking them dry.

The resource industry is currently riding an economic boom wave on the back of high international commodity prices, but there is no guarantee that position will continue, particularly with China's growth progress sustaining a much heralded hiccup at the moment. The royalties they provide have allowed this government to continue on its spendthrift ways and yet this government is going back to the well again—probably to drain it dry, this time forever.

The resource companies will cop a double whammy through the increased payroll tax levy so expect your fly-in fly-out workers around Queensland to have to learn to 'reskill', as a former Labor treasurer famously decreed. The Treasurer is always keen to quote American people, such as when referring to the valuation and the dodgy aspects of Treasury shifting the responsibilities of the titles office. Just ask JP Morgan and the Royal Bank of Canada for confirmation that payroll tax is a job-destroying tax.

Payroll tax is the most insidious and employment inhibiting tax possible. This government has determined to increase it when small business has just come through one of the toughest times ever because of the COVID-19 pandemic and now it is being coward punched again.

Mr Bailey: Don't let the facts get in the way of a good story.

Mr STEVENS: It is a good story; I take the interjection from the minister. Small business is being coward punched by a Labor government that is ignorant of the pain that it has endured. In fact, if it were not for the Morrison federal government's bailout of small business through JobKeeper and JobSeeker, the unemployment figures for Queensland would be astronomically higher. But don't worry: with this government's rampant attack on small business, inflation rates rocketing through the roof and interest rates on a rapidly rising exponential curve, this Labor government is signing the death warrant for small business in Queensland through their increased taxes and mortifying level of debt. Currently we are paying around \$3 billion in interest, only on repayments, and that figure will rise. \$3 billion would buy two new Gold Coast university hospitals or an alternative M1. Instead, we are squandering tax money on government inflicted debt.

The worst news is yet to come. With Queensland's inflation rate now at six per cent, the undeniable fact is that it will rise several percentage points before the end of the year and interest rates will necessarily follow, probably to the tune of four or five per cent. That will ring the death knell for the construction industry, particularly in our patch on the Gold Coast. The resultant real estate crash will add to the woes that this government will have to deal with through stamp duty collections because of their profligate spending and horrendous debt building over their many years in government.

From Beattie and his massive water infrastructure blowout, with the white elephant on the Gold Coast and the pipeline that has not been used since he left, to Bligh and now Palaszczuk, debt was the crutch that they relied on to prop up their bad financial management. Now they have maxed out their credit card when all around the world there are serious storm clouds on the financial horizon. There is not one economic forecaster, including Dr Philip Lowe, who is not advising everyone to knuckle down and put on their flak jackets and helmets for a very rough financial ride ahead. Unfortunately, this government has put itself in such a place that they will not be able to deal with any bad financial aspects that come around the corner. Without a doubt the new taxes will bring higher unemployment. The new high-interest payments on borrowings will compromise their budgetary spend. In 2024 the Queensland public will be begging for a new fiscally responsible government and 'Premier Crisafulli' will deliver.