



Speech By  
**Bart Mellish**


**MEMBER FOR ASPLEY**

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Record of Proceedings, 15 November 2023

**MOTION**

**Palaszczuk Labor Government Polling**

 **Mr MELLISH** (Aspley—ALP) (5.27 pm): I oppose the motion as it was moved and I support the amendment to the motion and wording moved by the member for Bulimba. When we see the opposition motion in its original wording, it is clearly a case of ‘do as I say and not as I do’. The best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour, and the biggest, baddest legacy of those opposite is Strong Choices—a crazy combination of a range of LNP views mixed in with its unwillingness and inability to run anything when in government. Every time the LNP gets in it does not know how to run things, so it turns to its mates in the private sector to help it out. Every time those opposite outsource basic government operations like communications to consultants and others in the private sector, and Strong Choices is the ultimate example of that. As we know, this is not small money; this is upwards of \$70 million and consultants got about \$20 million of that for Strong Choices. I imagine you could buy a few Emu Swamp Dams for that amount. Reading from a 9News article from 2015, multinational ad agency MediaCom got over \$11 million, political strategists Crosby Textor got \$1.8 million, digital grassroots agency Bluegrass Consulting \$1.6 million, and the list goes on.

Some of this money was for monitoring feedback to the Strong Choices website. I have nothing against any of these organisations for bidding for the work at the time, as is their right to do by and large, but what a colossal waste of money. We remember coming in after the 2015 election and seeing the enormous war room on level 9 at 100 George Street and completely outsourced Treasury communications—indeed central government communications—to the private sector.

It does say something about the member for Clayfield’s communication skills that when he was Treasurer he needed an entire army—a war room—of private sector communications professionals to try to sell his message. What was that message? I am sure the LNP would love Queenslanders to forget all about Strong Choices, but they did such an effective job of telling the public about their plan to sell assets that they won an award. Strong Choices was actually awarded the Public Affairs Asia gold standard award for government relations in 2015. It was awarded after the election, notably. It even went on to be nominated for a world award in public affairs in 2016. I would agree with them that it was gold standard in fleecing the taxpayer of funds. What are we talking about when it comes to this gold standard, award-winning Strong Choices? Was it simply public sentiment polling? Let us hear from the award description itself. It states—

Queensland Treasury engaged a senior multi-disciplinary team to develop a new approach to communicate the State’s debt position so that the public would understand the problem and why tough choices were required.

As we go through this, let’s compare and contrast it with seeking public sentiment and see the differences between Strong Choices and what the LNP’s motion is about. I continue—

Allowing input into policy decisions prior to the Queensland election cycle the integrated communications and public affairs campaign employed community engagement, the development of a community response document and a manifesto on the choices required to tackle the debt problems.

...

The 'Strong Choices' campaign was the most intensive engagement program ever undertaken by any branch of Australian government on finance issues and the outcomes were significant. In 56 days ... 70,000+ Queenslanders engaged with the digital and online tools—

and it goes on to say that 50,000 people joined virtual town halls, 55,000 individual submissions were sent to the Treasurer and there were 255,000 website visits. Government share of media voice also increased 200 per cent during the campaign. I continue—

As a result of the insight, the government developed a new policy model based on people's support for long-term leases that would replace sales ... While detailed research results were not released, it was publicly revealed that the Strong Choices campaign achieved 77% awareness among Queenslanders, 72% approval for the campaign itself, 89% support for action on debt.

It concludes—

'Strong Choices' was credited as Australia's largest and most innovative government campaign around budget and debt issues because it successfully engaged the population, helped frame a way forward for the State, and created widespread support for what were strong but difficult economic choices.

We have a spoiler. I think we know the ending. It did not do any of that. All it did was inform the public of the LNP's wrong priorities. They have wrong priorities now; they had wrong priorities then. When we are talking about contrasting seeking public sentiment with a \$70 million campaign to sell assets that they botched at the end and could not deal with the outcome, we are talking about two entirely different things. It is a case of 'do as I say, not as I do' from the LNP opposition.