




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (11.43 am): As legendary Rugby League coach Jack Gibson would say, my budget reply speech this year is ‘deja vu all over again’ in terms of my 2022 budget reply speech, which highlighted growing debt, profligate spending on the credit card and recycled projects from yesteryear.

With record coal royalties underwriting their failed financial planning, this government has gone bust in a boom. This budget again is filled with promised projects on the never-never, deceitful figure fudging on the parlous state of Queensland debt and the ‘Mr Bean’ of fiscal accountability, the Treasurer, Cameron Dick, blaming everyone for the chaos and crisis in the health system, youth crime, homelessness and cost-of-living pressure caused by cost blowouts on government projects and government extortion on electricity prices through government owned power generators as wholesalers to the industry.

With inflation skyrocketing, mortgage stress creeping stealthily through our suburbs and business confidence slumping on the back of this government’s taxing regime on all businesses, I can only feel sympathy for Queenslanders trying to understand why their current Labor government has led this slide into economic hardship when we should be Queensland, the boom state. We have record migration and record income from stamp duty and mineral royalties and yet we are wallowing in \$147 billion of debt, racked up by a government unconcerned about the pain they are inflicting on future generations, probably because they think it will not be their problem anyway.

They have lost the blame card of the Morrison LNP federal government in Canberra because their union mates are in control down there. With interest rates rising as the Reserve Bank’s only answer to out-of-control inflation, Labor are turning their blame game excuses on to Reserve Bank Governor, Philip Lowe, to deflect their incompetence at appropriately and successfully managing the economy.

Increased taxes, fees and charges are the hallmarks of a Labor government clawing back their indiscriminate spending. Yet real solutions to the health crisis, public housing crisis, renting crisis, youth crime crisis, cost-of-living crisis and police recruitment crisis have not been satisfied by the record income received by this Labor government. In fact, crisis is Labor’s middle name.

Has ambulance ramping been cured by the so-called record spend in health? No! Has youth crime been halted by tougher laws and intervention programs? No! Police numbers are down and yet we have a police minister insisting that ‘approved’ police numbers count in helping to prevent the skyrocketing increase in crime activity, particularly in my patch on the Gold Coast.

I look at the glossy brochure in the budget papers for the Gold Coast and the recycled light rail stage 3 project is featured once again. There is no mention of more funding for police in an area that has taken a large percentage of the population migration to Queensland and a miserly allocation for the start of a new hospital in the northern part of the Gold Coast when the reality is it should have been built yesterday. All we get is more spin about satellite hospitals, which are really day care surgeries, and more drip-feed of infrastructure in an area that endures the pain of population—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Pause the clock. Member for Nanango and Minister, please cease your interjection. Minister, you cannot talk from the middle of the chamber. Do not do that again.

Mr STEVENS: All we get is more spin about satellite hospitals, which are really day care surgeries, and more drip-feed of infrastructure in an area that endures the pain of population pressure growth without the necessary commitment of government expenditure required to meet that population explosion.

As the M1 continues to choke with more vehicle traffic associated with that rapid population growth, the drip-feed approach to addressing the economic and pollution problem caused by this Labor government's failure to commit to proper solutions will result in the M1 being the most expensive parking lot in Australia. Four-hour delays are already regular occurrences and anyone heading between Australia's third largest city and Australia's sixth largest city is always fearful of valuable time out caused by this Labor government's inaction on the matter. It is the New South Wales-Queensland border bypass road delay all over again. That was from the Merri Rose era. Then there was the Goss government's delay on the 'koala highway', which cost them government. I have no doubt today's commuters on the M1 can only blame this Palaszczuk Labor government for the delay and inconvenience caused by inaction on this project.

This Labor government crows about how good the 2032 Olympics will be when all international visitors will see is a road clogged to parking lot standard and a train system incapable of handling the overflow numbers in a timely fashion. I cannot believe the hypocrisy of the Treasurer and his government, who suddenly find the wonderful benefits of the coal industry in Queensland. From a government that were embarrassed to say the word 'coal' as opposed to their renewable energy mantra, good old coal has come back to rescue them in their darkest hour of a financial crisis.

I still cannot understand the difference to the world that coal being burnt by China, as opposed to being burnt by Australia, makes to the atmosphere, but it sure as hell makes a difference to the cost of power in Queensland. Every Queenslanders is feeling the pain of higher electricity prices, from the little old pensioner right through to the small businesses that are relying on power. I heard the Labor ministers moaning about job numbers not being mentioned in the opposition leader's budget reply speech. Yet, recently released job data gives me great pleasure. While unemployment fell nationally to 3.6 per cent, in Queensland guess what happened? It rose to 3.9 per cent. By Labor's own measuring stick, this means that this government is failing the Queensland workforce.

This state has an abundant resource industry, a multibillion dollar agriculture industry and is the biggest tourism state of all and yet unemployment rose under this incompetent Labor government. Even their union masters would be shamed by this embarrassing figure so yes, Treasurer, let us talk about your job management. The only job management the Treasurer is concerned about when using his fake Rowan Atkinson smile while selling bad budgetary news to Queenslanders is his elevation to his AWU mate the Premier's job when she leaves parliament by the end of the year. The AWU right faction took a pre-emptive strike on the left's darling candidate for Premier, the member for Waterford, by giving her the challenging role of health minister. I feel either minister will make a fantastic opposition leader in 2024.

With one more budget to go, and treacherous economic winds swirling around 2024, this Labor government has spent all of the political capital gained from the 2015 election, and the people of Queensland have grown tired of the spin, crisis and chaos that has overtaken any ill thoughts about an LNP government that Labor is desperately trying to reinvent.

I note in the glossy brochure for the Gold Coast that there are 1,670 extra nurses, 711 extra teachers, 405 extra doctors and 41 extra firefighters but no extra police. They have run out of ideas in terms of the thin blue line. All we see in Queensland, and particularly on the Gold Coast, is the thin blue line getting thinner.

Mr Krause interjected.

Mr STEVENS: I take the interjection from the member for Scenic Rim—there will be no blue line by the time this government has finished. Has Labor given up on fixing criminal behaviour on the Gold Coast? What about the poor police members who are currently struggling to keep up with the rising crime statistics?

I am pleased about the new building that is going up at Miami State High School, care of Minister Grace Grace, but it is reannounced as a new project when it has appeared in budget papers for the Gold Coast three times before. I think the pyramids in Egypt were built quicker than the drip-feed approach this government takes to infrastructure projects, but any commitments to the schools in my area are welcome.

This 2023 budget is another budget that has been delivered with the consistent gusto and spin of a Labor government that is financially bankrupt of ideas and devoid of planning to address Queenslanders' greatest fears on the cost of living, the health crisis, youth crime, homelessness and the rental crisis. Queenslanders deserve better than this. Hopefully, they will get that opportunity in 15 months time.

I make reference to the blowouts that have caused enormous pain across the board for Queensland taxpayers. We look at the budgeted figures, originally of treasurer Trad, for Cross River Rail of \$5.9 billion. Yes, that is the amount it will come in at. We are now \$3,000 million over that figure. You have to wonder how someone budgeting for expenditure on major infrastructure in Queensland can get the figure so horribly wrong—\$3,000 million out. I think \$1 million is terrific—I would love \$1 million to come through for my electorate—but \$3,000 million is an enormous error to make in budget figures. The blowouts are costing taxpayers right across the board.

Mr Krause interjected.

Mr STEVENS: I take the member for the Scenic Rim's interjection again. We have not even mentioned the blowouts on the Gabba, and it is only a few years away until 2032. We can guarantee that more cost blowouts will affect Queensland taxpayers in the years to come. I note that the theme of this year's budget from the government is the 'Big Build budget for 2023'. It is exactly the same as the genius in Victoria, Dan Andrews, with his big build budget. That side is plagiarising the wonderfully successful Victorian government that is now sacking public servants and cutting infrastructure. The Victorian Premier is now basically parachuting out of his job because he has destroyed Victoria with his big build project rubbish. That is exactly what we are seeing now from the copycats in Queensland. It will end up in the same mess if they continue on their merry way of spending money they do not have—spending our money that they would like to get hold of through new taxes and increased spending.

In the last couple of minutes that I have remaining, I refer to a matter that I have been quite concerned about in terms of budgetary issues—that is, the transfer of the titles office by the Treasurer to a company that is independent of government, even though it has government employees working for it. It is valued at \$7.6 billion on the government's balance sheet. Now we find out, through the Auditor-General, that the Treasurer has transferred 25 per cent of that valuation to the QIC—about \$1.8 billion in round figures. When the government put that legislation through, there was a commitment that we cannot sell the titles office under any circumstances—that commitment does not apply to the QIC. It has been passed across to the QIC and it will be privatisation by stealth.

We have heard the shadow Attorney-General recant the raids of Public Service funds over the years. It was spot on. This is a worry for public servants in terms of their defined benefit scheme. If I was in that scheme—I am not—I would be very worried about what this government is doing with my finances. They keep saying that it is fully funded, but the reality is that they keep edging it off every which way and getting valuations over 50 years that do not stack up on a 'sell tomorrow' basis. The financial credibility of this Treasurer is shot. They have one more budget to go. We cannot wait until we have a decent LNP government to bring us financial responsibility.

(Time expired)

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hart): Member for Mermaid Beach, I am advised that you used some unparliamentary language during your speech.

Mr STEVENS: I withdraw.