




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Miles Labor Government, Star Casino

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (2.38 pm): Things are genuinely tough for Queenslanders right now, but we received a bit of good news from this government last week. Apparently, you just have to ask for a massive, multimillion dollar handout and you will get one. Jokes—that is only if you are in the right industry.

Last week the Premier confirmed that they will give a multimillion dollar handout to Star casino. This is the same company found unsuitable to hold a casino licence due to corrupt conduct and links to organised crime. This is the same Star casino that has been given a tax deferral worth hundreds of millions of dollars. That is hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars that could be spent on social housing or on free meal programs for kids or on public health care or on state schools. Those things are apparently less important than keeping this shonky casino operator afloat.

Labor are trying to tell us they have no alternative but to prop up Star casino with taxpayer dollars. They want us to forget that this is not even the first time they have used Queenslanders' money to bolster Star's profits. The Queen's Wharf development should never have gone ahead. It should never have been approved. The state government should never have agreed to hand over 10 per cent of the Brisbane CBD to a gambling company on a 99-year lease. They should never have agreed to let them install thousands of new life-destroying pokies and lock away public space for multimillion dollar apartments that no ordinary person can afford.

We should have guessed that something was not quite right with Star when none of the details of the government's agreement with them were released—not the lease, not the community impact statement, not the cost-benefit analysis, no probity checks, no business case, nothing. Labor did not ditch this deal with Star when they could have—instead, they doubled down. In 2022 when the Gotterson inquiry found that Star should not even hold a casino licence in Queensland, Labor should have cancelled their licence there and then. Instead they repeatedly deferred a 90-day suspension, protecting Star from having to release any details of their remediation plan, and they endorsed their continued development of the Queen's Wharf mega casino.

What of the fine Star got for proven corrupt and criminal behaviour—behaviour including money laundering and actively encouraging gamblers who were banned in other states to come up here to Queensland and bet? That fine was substantially less than what they are getting back now in the form of tax breaks from Labor.

What are ordinary people and small businesses in Queensland supposed to take away from this? Is the take-home lesson that maybe they should all break the law, miss key financial reporting deadlines and wait for a taxpayer bailout or does that only work if you are major donors to the Labor Party? Does that only work if you have the right personal connections or lobbyists on your side? Even the CFMEU

did not get this kind of special treatment. The Labor Party did not think it was so important to protect the jobs of Queensland union staff fired without any accusations of wrongdoing, did they? When it comes to the gambling lobby, there is apparently nothing this Labor government will not do for them.

Star was suspended from trading last week after failing to lodge their financial reports on time, and there is a very real chance they could go bust, but we have some high rollers in this House. Premier Miles is going to put hundreds of millions of dollars on the table. He is all in on Star this time round. It is not his money of course; it is Queensland taxpayers' money. If Star goes bust, who will be picking up the tab now? It will be Queenslanders.

I do not know what conversations the Premier is having, but I have not had a single person in the community tell me they want their money spent on bailing out corrupt flailing casino operators. Would you rather a thousand more pokies or more public homes? I think I know how the families who are living in crisis accommodation in my electorate would answer that. I think the Premier should speak to some of the students who come to my weekly community meals in Auchenflower and explain why it is that Star is getting a tax break while they are struggling to afford food. I would like him to tell the students at Indooroopilly State High why they are learning in demountables and do not have science labs and are going without enough bathrooms while Star gets a handout.

I want to know how this Labor government justifies public money for casino operators, for fossil fuel companies and for the greyhound racing industry while ordinary Queensland families skip meals, delay seeing the doctor, miss out on school activities and struggle to keep a roof over their heads. This government can never again tell us there is no money to spare. We know there is money to spare if they are just willing to prioritise something. The question is: when will they prioritise the needs of ordinary Queenslanders over big corporate profits?