



Speech by

## Jann Stuckey

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

Hansard Thursday, 21 May 2009

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### ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

**Mrs STUCKEY** (Currumbin—LNP) (8.06 pm): I wish to place on record my condolences to the family of Mark Bayliss from the Gold Coast who lost his life in a freak accident during the raging weather earlier this week.

As is the case with most other members, it has been my practice to use the address-in-reply debate to illuminate issues which bear directly on the concerns of the people in my electorate of Currumbin. Before doing so though, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate every member who makes up the 89 electorates of our great state in this the 53rd Queensland Parliament. It is important for each of us to uphold the integrity of this revered institution and to represent our constituents with vigour and honesty.

The sterling efforts of our LNP team, who after a mere seven months since our party's birth ran a credible campaign, deserve notation. I personally acknowledge Lawrence Springborg for showing immeasurable courage and leadership in making political history by bringing the Liberal and National parties together to form the LNP. This was an enormously bold feat. I offer my warm felicitations to each of my LNP colleagues from the 52nd Parliament who have all been returned due to their incredibly hard work and strong representation. I give my sincere congratulations to our leader, John-Paul Langbroek MP, the honourable member for Surfers Paradise, who entered this House with me in February 2004. I would also like to congratulate the Speaker on his appointment to this parliament.

For me it is truly a great honour and a privilege to be re-elected by the people of Currumbin to serve them once again. Honourable members of the past two terms of parliament have heard me continually sing the praises of the breathtakingly beautiful area I represent and the wonderful people who reside therein. But I have also talked about the challenges that we face.

Living in Currumbin for 22 years I have developed a deep attachment and an unwavering commitment to serve my community. However, I do want to reflect on the many talented and hardworking colleagues who did not win their seats on my side of politics. I urge them to consider going around the block again, as we gave this increasingly arrogant Labor government a serious shake-up gaining 11 new seats.

Persistence coupled with a deep hunger really does pay off, and I am thrilled to be able to welcome two great women and close personal friends into the parliament. Ros Bates won Mudgeeraba and Tracy Davis won Aspley comfortably. Both made the decision to give it another go, and both worked tirelessly and with integrity to reach their goals. I am sure that the people in their respective electorates will soon realise what worthy representatives they have chosen.

As is the case with other honourable members, I am deeply indebted to the outstanding and selfless efforts of a small army of individuals, most of them volunteers, who helped achieve the victory in Currumbin in some way. My heartfelt gratitude is extended to every single one of you and I am sorry there are too many names to mention here.

My branch is truly outstanding, always willing to lend a hand, run a raffle and man a booth, or 'woman' a booth, and my campaign team—of Arthur Elliott, Peter Barrett, Minna Knight, Ben Naday and

his family, Susannah Singleton, Royce Brimmer, Keith Arnold, Tim Gear and Elyse McNeil—went the extra mile time and again, so thank you. To Robert Wright, Anne and Allen Hertel, Jennie Fairlie, Laurel Whitehouse, Ann Phillips, Doreen and the girls, my family and especially our wonderful son, Edward, who spent the day driving me to all of the booths, my gratitude is extended to each of you.

Bill Garay, whom I had never met, gave up 10 half-days at the Coolangatta Courthouse for prepolling, and that is a pretty dull task if you have seen how few people go through there. Ron Peebles was a gem. Away at election time, he was so determined to vote for me that he drove to Cunnamulla, which was a 365-kilometre return trip, just to lodge his vote. Bev Malseed, who is the mainstay of my electorate office, managed the heavy load of calls and demands that an election places upon our usual business in her professional, friendly and efficient manner. My special thanks go to Carly McNeil, our school captain volunteer, who has assisted every Friday. My husband and soul mate, Richard, once again made huge sacrifices by juggling his busy medical practice and directing my campaign at a moment's notice, due to the extra-early election forced upon us by the Premier.

During the past 2½ years of the 52nd Parliament, I was blessed to work with some accomplished, capable people, and I refer to Michael Read, my policy adviser for Child Safety who is a true champion; Les Preston, who assisted with the writing of some of my forceful speeches; Kerry-Ann Harmann-Schufft, for her valuable policy advice; and my senior mentor, Bill Hartigan, whose wisdom and intelligence I am grateful to have available to me.

A year ago, the global financial failure was barely underway and certainly had raised no great concerns with the Treasurer or the government at large. In the 2008-09 budget, the Premier and the Treasurer were projecting an operating surplus of \$583 million and a Capital Works Program to be financed mainly by debt. This, the Treasurer averred, could easily be serviced, even recognising that no principal repayment was planned either in this financial year or through the following years, so that by 2011-12 debt would rise from the \$41.6 billion projected for 2008-09 to \$64 billion.

A lot has happened since then. In February of this year, the Treasurer advised that there would be a deficit of \$1.5 billion this year, which is a \$2 billion turnaround. Future debt for 2011-12 had increased to an enormous \$74 billion, which is a 30 per cent increase over the budget estimate. Almost all of this increasing debt was due to continuing budget deficits, so that debt was being used to fund what even this government would recognise as recurrent expenditure. We in opposition accept that the global financial dilemma was much larger than anyone projected and that it grew very rapidly. We also accept that the global scale of the meltdown and its genesis in the larger economies raised external threats to Australia's wellbeing that would require Australian governments of all persuasions to adjust to it in a radical manner.

Of course, no Australian is immune to the adverse impact of this problem. In Currumbin there is increased unemployment, especially around Coolangatta, superannuants are closely watching their savings, the standard of living has declined massively, and businesses of all sizes are losing money, are contracting and are laying off staff as the economy runs down. Even though we may be able to boast that Australia is weathering the storm much better than other economies, this is due in large measure to the sound, prudent management of the economy by the Howard conservative government, which eliminated \$94 billion of debt created by Labor, left an incoming Labor administration with an operating surplus and unfunded liabilities of superannuation were largely reduced.

This of course stands in stark contrast to the situation here in Queensland, where Labor was incapable of managing the state's finances and, notwithstanding an unprecedented inflow of revenue, used debt to camouflage its incompetence. We acknowledge that there is a need to stimulate the economy, and particularly the private sector, by investing in capital works which will enhance the state's future growth and international competitiveness. The LNP even accepts that debt could be used to finance such works, as they are by their nature recurrent—such as roads, ports, schools and hospitals, which are not designed to produce a revenue stream to finance debt servicing—in the expectation that it will return the state economy to growth and rising revenues. Importantly, it would address the basic social and economic needs of the good people I represent in Currumbin.

At the same time, the present crisis should not be used as an excuse for the government to turn away from the reform of its public sector responsibilities. Perhaps there will be a reduction in health and education funding, a decline in the police presence or an increase in the cost of power, water, electricity and transport, some of which we have already seen—or indeed in more than one form of revenue raising—due to the failure by this government to reform the public sector.

Absolute untruths hurled about during the campaign were typical form of Labor government members. Not content to tell the truth, they manufactured furrphies and spewed them out through the unions. By his own admission, the Treasurer advised that about 6.5 per cent of the public sector workforce leave each year. That is about 11,000 public servants who retire or resign. Surely not every single one of these jobs is required. The government's idea of reform is to reduce the number of ministries to 13 superministries but not the number of ministers or senior public servants. In a miraculous but unexplained

manner, this one-time step will save \$200 million per annum, or roughly enough to pay 20 days interest, leaving borrowings as the preferred option to pay the rest of the interest of some \$3.4 billion in 2011-12.

Premier Bligh at the recent election promised to produce a net increase in employment of 100,000 people in this term of government. If this were to happen—and it was sustainable, not just a temporary bubble based on rising debt—then the people of Currumbin would have some faith in the future.

People in my electorate are thinkers. They care about their region and remain unconvinced about the government's capacity, even intentions, to return confidence and growth to the Queensland economy and society, especially when the Premier outsources the police and emergency services uniforms to locations like China instead of giving jobs to Aussies.

The government has a responsibility to outline precisely how it is going to handle the rising burden of unfunded debt when it has ruled out any intention of substantially improving the cost and efficiency of government. When asked this question earlier this year, the Treasurer could not answer it, and he failed to give a satisfactory answer yet again today. Without qualified answers, this government's promise of continuous and ongoing improvement in health, education, roads, public transport and personal security remains a cruel hoax on the people of Currumbin and all Queenslanders.

The people of Currumbin have placed their trust in me for the third time to fight for a fair deal and maintain the quality of life that we so treasure. I am committed to maintaining high levels of community consultation so that the best decisions can be made for our electorate. I am very pleased that a number of election promises were made, albeit in haste, to Currumbin residents. Now both they and I want to see them delivered. On behalf of my constituents, I fully intend to hold all members on the government benches to account.

An issue that enraged residents into a prolonged protest was Energex's proposal to install overhead 110kv powerlines through suburban Palm Beach and Currumbin via a route between Mudgeeraba and Tugun. Enormous public unrest for a large number of residents who felt they had not been consulted about this massive intrusion into their neighbourhoods saw the formation of STOP—which is the Stop The Overhead Powerlines Group—headed by John and Pam Cooper, Norm and Laurel Jefferson, Vaughan and Molly Moran, Neville Richardson, Rose Adams, Lois Levy and Paul Smith from Reedy Creek. They all lobbied loud and hard for the undergrounding of powerlines through their suburbs.

These individuals are all to be congratulated for their herculean efforts in advocating for people who felt that their homes would be resumed or devalued, their health affected and vegetation lost. The STOP Group was deeply disappointed with the member for Burleigh, saying she abandoned her constituents and gave up the fight early on, saying in a letter she could sleep at night knowing she had done her best. Well, a number of her constituents could not sleep. They were worried sick, constantly being fobbed off with the excuse the minister's hands were tied and we had to wait for Energex's report.

Notably, it has long been a policy of the conservative side of politics to underground high-voltage powerlines through established communities, so it was no surprise when we announced we would do so through Reedy Creek, Palm Beach and Currumbin. But surprise, surprise, several days after our announcement Labor came up with its promise offering \$1 million extra. So where is it? Surely as this was included in Labor's costings it has been accounted for, or has it?

What if they were not being honest? No amount is recorded on the one-page list that was Labor's offerings. Conveniently the minister—the member for Ferny Grove—has moved into another portfolio, and just as well, as the ridicule he aimed at the opposition pre-election regarding this policy would have come right back in his face. This was shameful behaviour and an awful way to treat people, forcing them to live under daily stress.

Since the Tweed River Entrance Sand Bypassing Project commenced over eight years ago, southern Gold Coast beaches have been oversupplied with sand, surf breaks including world-famous Kirra have been lost, and the government has stuck its head in the sand. This project was meant to supply sand to Gold Coast beaches and protect them from erosion while clearing surplus sand from the notorious Tweed Bar, but poor management, and a lack of flexibility and thorough monitoring has caused environmental damage and reduction for businesses and surf clubs.

Frustrations over inaction by Queensland and New South Wales Labor governments culminated in an Australia Day protest paddle organised by the Surfriider organisation and the Kirra Point Committee. Some 1,500 surfers including Mick Fanning, Stephanie Gilmore and Wayne Bartholomew took part and formed a map of Australia in the water. I was out there with them and I can tell honourable members it was a buzz. After eight years of neglect and total disinterest from both of the state's ministers over the effect this project was having, lo and behold the Queensland government finally took its head out of the sand in early February and said that it would speak to its New South Wales counterparts with whom it had signed a 24-year contract. But it was full steam ahead when the Queensland government got wind that the LNP was going to announce funding and commit to a long-term strategy during the first week of the election

campaign. They could not wait to announce some funding and cobbled together \$1.5 million to toss at the problem. However, the LNP went further, matching Labor's funding, included the local community in future plans and promised an urgent audit.

We are almost two months post election now and the government must prove it was serious about addressing this issue. Attempts to view the contract between New South Wales and Queensland have failed. Many, including myself, believe that the contracts hold the key. Has it been breached? Were key recommendations ever included? Why the secrecy if there is nothing to hide? FOI documents I requested were exempted for confidentiality reasons. However, stakeholders are of the opinion that public interest outweighs these concerns. A further request for an internal review was also knocked back, so the final avenue is an external review.

The Currumbin electorate has been the epicentre of construction works these past three years, with both the Tugun bypass and desalination plant in one suburb. Close to \$2 billion has been invested in infrastructure which during construction caused enormous disruption, noise and dirt for these patient and understanding residents. After all, they had waited 20 years for a bypass only to be told they were getting a huge desal plant in their midst, too. While the bypass has at long last been delivered, we are still waiting for the desalination plant, which has caused enormous heartache, although rumours that iron framework in the Tugun bypass tunnel is corroding are eroding public confidence in this government's ability to manage anything competently or on budget.

Regularly calls are received from people who believe they have been directly affected by vibrations during laying of massive water pipes through suburban streets that have seen roads not properly restored, cracks appearing in walls, ceilings, driveways, and doors and windows dropping. It is fine to say that we needed the water and we are helping the good folk in Brisbane. You try to tell the people who are worried sick about the damage to their family homes that they do not have a case to answer and see what kind of response you get. They feel like they have been hung out to dry. This government has a responsibility to provide assistance to people's properties and playing fields. The Tugun footy club is literally sinking. The soccer club has also been badly affected, and there is a strong belief that the desal construction rapidly accelerated their deterioration.

My opponents stated on ABC Radio two days out from the election that Deputy Premier Lucas had publicly guaranteed to withhold \$100 million from progress payments to restore people's homes to pre-desalination conditions. I could not find any reference by the Deputy Premier, so was my Labor opponent telling a complete untruth? Anything to grab a few votes; never mind the misery and false hope being peddled in abundance. This same Labor candidate did this in 2006, promising a call-in of a huge inappropriate development in Currumbin Valley. Labor tried to fool people then and I dearly hope that they are not doing so again now.

People with legitimate cases of damage to their homes and driveways deserve to be compensated, and I ask this government to show some decency and give them some assurance it will happen. After all, this project was forced onto the good people of my electorate with little warning, minimal environmental assessments and at a huge personal impost.

Yesterday I tabled a petition with 435 signatures seeking assurance from the state government that their properties will be restored. So many unanswered questions remain while the desal plant is not yet fully operating. Currumbin Sanctuary missed out again. The poor old sanctuary. There is still no funding from the government, yet the Premier callously milked it for a photo opportunity a day out from the election. I wonder why she did not turn up in her hard hat at the desal plant.

I am privileged to represent the people of Currumbin and to be a member of this, the 53rd Parliament. I look forward to serving both with the same energy, passion and vigour as I have done for the last five years, and I look forward to the debate with every member in this House.