



Speech by

**Jann Stuckey**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

Hansard Wednesday, 12 November 2008

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## **MOTION: BEATTIE-BLIGH GOVERNMENT, PUBLIC RELATIONS**

**Mrs STUCKEY** (Currumbin—LNP) (5.39 pm): I rise to happily second the motion moved this evening by the honourable member for Caloundra and shadow minister for health. How can the people of Queensland have any faith in the Bligh government? They make a mockery of the words transparency and accountability. Last year in December it was revealed this Labor government spent almost \$1 billion of taxpayers' money on outside help. Premier Bligh defended this spending by saying that short-term specialists were cheaper than hiring someone full time. But could she give us a breakdown of how this money was spent? No.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** You will not be hearing any 'yeah' today, you will be hearing lots of 'no'. The honourable member for Caloundra quoted the Premier who said, 'Consultancy, advertising and marketing, these are areas which I think we can and should be trimming.' This promised belt-tightening exercise was not, she assured, cutting spending but she would make sure that every dollar that goes into activity goes into the most important areas. And she wants us to believe her given her government's track record.

Let me tell members what our cocky little Treasurer had to say in February this year. He said, 'We have to go to war against soft padding. We need to make sure we can satisfy ourselves that every last dollar we give to them is going to the front line.' No wonder Premier Bligh and all of her ministers and government members are bleating the same pathetic message about looking over the horizon. Wait a minute—more like somewhere over the rainbow. My apologies to the late Billy Thorpe. There is no offence directed at him or his hit song. But we all know what is supposed to be at the end of the rainbow. We all know it is a fictional pot of gold just like the spin this government coats over everything at taxpayers' expense.

The LNP is asking the Premier to come clean with the details of this spending on a monthly basis. After all, she recently legislated with regard to donors giving amounts of \$100,000 or more to report that within 14 days. We are asking for it be done in a month. I am sure the people of Queensland would be interested to know what this nearly billion dollars worth of consultants and specialists were specifically employed to do. Did they perform satisfactorily? Why could the permanent staff not provide the expertise? Was the amount of funds used to employ consultants specifically provided for in the last budget or was it relocated from other budget areas?

The LNP is committed to supporting our front-line workers across government departments—our police, nurses, ambos, fires, doctors and, of course, child safety staff. I have heard countless tales of bullying, low morale, unrealistic workloads, burnout, inadequate training and lack of supervision. Imagine how many jobs and better conditions a billion bucks would provide?

Surely members opposite hear these same complaints. Do they stand up for the people who make them? No. No, they do not have any empathy or understanding. If they do, they keep it to themselves which is absolutely shameful. No wonder so many people come knocking on my door on the Gold Coast because the silent six on the Gold Coast ignore their pleas.

The Department of Child Safety spent \$24.8 million on outside consultants last year. This was an increase of 40 per cent on the previous year. The department currently employs 10 full-time media/communication officers at an estimated cost of around \$1 million. Is this what the Premier means by making sure that every dollar that goes into activity goes into the most important areas? The child safety minister obviously does not think so.

Meanwhile, child safety lurches from one crisis to another. The minister reacts in an ad hoc and reactive manner to staff retention when it is a serious concern. Figures show 35 per cent or 852 staff resigned in 2007-08. That is out of a total workforce of 2,408. Staff turnover in child safety is in fact five times the average of the state Public Service, which is not what the minister told the House this morning. Growth of bureaucracy was more than double that of front-line CSOs according to reports tabled in April. Staff burnout from case overloading, an inadequate ICMS and a dire shortage of specialised sexual abuse counselling are all in need of attention.

It always strikes me as curious that government departments such as child safety, which have the monopoly on the subject, pay money to outside consultants who generally and by definition can know very little about the particularities of the subject. It of course also tells us that the minister is in nominal control of the department and is incapable of managing ministerial responsibility.

The pressure on child safety and other front-line workers is immense. They deserve support. But every time an opposition member stands up to defend the shoddy treatment they receive at the hands of this Labor government members opposite use their huge majority to shout us down. They are so good at dishing it out—nothing but bullies—but typically they cannot take truthful criticism. Cynics would say that they only hire consultants to tell them what they want to hear but with a gloss of independent examination. This government uses spin as an art form to sugar coat the truth.