



Speech by


**Jann Stuckey**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

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## **APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER LEVY REPEAL AND REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mrs STUCKEY** (Currumbin—LNP) (5.25 pm): I rise to join the cognate debate on the Appropriate (Parliament) Bill 2011 and the Community Ambulance Cover Levy Repeal and Revenue and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2011. In doing so, I congratulate the shadow Treasurer, the honourable member for Clayfield, for his forthright and responsible budget reply speech on behalf of the LNP.

Over the past decade or so, Queensland has had the great misfortune to suffer a continuous series of economic setbacks. Those setbacks are properly and correctly called the Labor Party. Over this period, Labor has made absolutely no effort to reign in its administrative costs, particularly the size of the bureaucracy and its salary levels that are excessive in contrast to the state's front-line workforce in education, health and police. The Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry responded to this year's budget with concerns that the budget deficit of \$2.13 billion for 2010-11 is \$600 million higher than the midyear fiscal and economic review released in only February of this year. More troubling, they say, is the budget deficit ballooning out to \$4.06 billion in 2011-12, with net debt expected to reach \$84.9 billion by 2014-15.

Much of the general government investment in public non-income assets will be funded by more debt. This budget is less about 2011-12 than it is about 2001-02 and the intervening period of waste, vote buying and administrative incompetence. The state will have to spend close to \$2 billion on flood damage repair because it had neither insurance nor adequate contingency reserves, notwithstanding the known extreme cyclical climatic conditions in Queensland. In short, they did not save for a rainy day.

This year's budget is merely the mouth of a financial blackhole, not an exceptional one-off natural disaster. Labor's answer is that everything will be better in the coming years, we just have to wait and it will happen. Clearly there is no intention to reduce expenditure or deal with out-of-control rising costs in both the general government or the GOCs, notwithstanding the government's own admission in last year's budget that GOCs were in need of reform to improve productivity and profits in line with what would be expected in the private sector.

Budget details are merely background noise to the main game, the ever-increasing debt in the general government unfunded debt. The Queensland people are entitled to know what else, other than hoping things will get better, the Treasurer has in mind to address the ideological addiction Labor has to debt, which is unavoidably a massive threat to services and of much higher taxes and prices in the future.

**Mr Schwarten** interjected.

**Ms Male** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Rockhampton, member for Pine Rivers.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** There are no political, constitutional or legal reasons why the Treasurer should not address the question of unfunded debt. He must be aware of it.

**Mr Schwarten:** She said terrible things about me, Mr Deputy Speaker. I don't want to listen to this crap.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I ask you to withdraw that unparliamentary comment, member for Rockhampton.

**Mr Schwarten:** I withdraw.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Perhaps the honourable member will withdraw from the chamber.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Currumbin, I am in the chair and I will continue to do my job as best I can. You have the call, please continue.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** Both the Tasmanian and South Australian Labor governments have recognised that you cannot live beyond your means. Why not Queensland? Campbell Newman and an LNP government will do what has to be done and will save money and deliver more by taking action on the basics and cutting waste. Queensland's Premier, Anna Bligh, left the hand-on-heart routine to her Treasurer for this year's budget. There were no more 'you can count on me' pledges; it was a case of flicking the tough stuff to her understudy and hoping the spin works. The Treasurer, the honourable member for Mount Coot-tha, was so nonplussed about this year's budget or was too embarrassed to even present it that he rose to deliver this most important speech of the year without it in his hands.

The *Courier-Mail* labelled the budget this year as the 'big steal' and a Channel 9 poll on Wednesday night revealed that 87 per cent of people thought they would be worse off and a mere 13 per cent thought they would be better off. No matter how reliable this type of poll has proven to be, that is a shocker of a result for the Bligh government and her wonder boy, the Treasurer. The gloss has certainly worn off and it has laid bare these true spin merchants once and for all.

In essence, this budget is no more than the same old misleading and dangerous failure to deal with a major and growing financial problem that Labor has created over almost two decades of self-delusion that that debt will evaporate at some time in the future and that the evil day of reckoning can be deferred indefinitely. Sure, there is a sweetener designed to buy some votes: the ambulance levy will be removed from Queenslanders' electricity bills as of 1 July this year. Even the Treasurer admitted that this was a regressive levy, and it is one that we on this side of the House argued against when Premier Beattie imposed it on everyone back in 2003.

However, the real sting for homeowners is in the form of stamp duty, which will almost double in the case of the sale of the average \$500,000 home. Real estate agents on the Gold Coast are saying that the state government's move to scrap the home concession on the transfer duty will lead to job losses, higher rents and lower house values, pushing this already fragile industry over the edge.

Mark my words, this budget will greatly and negatively affect future economic growth and public services in Queensland. Yet we are told by the Treasurer, the Premier and other Labor members, 'Sit tight. We're on the way back now. The new wave of prosperity is about to wash over us.' We have heard all this before: 'Sell the state's assets off and all will be fine.' But it is not, is it? Queenslanders cannot trust a word that this Labor government says.

Despite selling off \$17 billion of assets supposedly to reduce debt, Labor's mismanagement means that debt will rise further, to \$85 billion—or \$595,000 an hour or \$100 million a week in interest—causing Queenslanders' cost of living to skyrocket. How many new hospitals, schools and roads could have been built with this money? If the state did not have the monopoly on a variety of taxes and charges, no financial body would lend the Queensland government money. In the private sector, banks would demand that a borrower in such circumstances move quickly to eliminate debt and return to a profitable position.

The state of Queensland's finances is of even more concern in the still-fragile environment of the global economy which will see continuing downward pressure applied on tax revenues in this country, exaggerated by the attack of the Commonwealth on the profitability of Queensland's mining industry. Now we hear that the Gillard government will blow \$12 million on advertising propaganda for its carbon tax, and the Bligh government is supporting her. Their wasteful spending knows no bounds.

There will be an election in Queensland in the next 12 months. For our part, the LNP will not join Labor in a denial of the terminal seriousness of Queensland's finances, its lack of direction and long-term policy, and the further use of unfunded debt in another attempt at vote buying based upon deception and dishonesty. On listening to the delusional blubbing of government members blindly espousing the good times ahead, I felt I was witnessing the kind of brainwashing that one reads about relating to cults. I am a 'glass half full' person most of the time, but deliberately misleading the public is not only cruel; it is downright dishonest. Every single year we hear a different excuse from this tired Labor government and every year Queensland is plunged further into debt. As honourable members heard from the shadow Treasurer, the honourable member for Clayfield, the LNP will implement policies to actively save households \$250 to \$330 per year, including reforms to electricity pricing and a reintroduction of the abolished stamp duty concession. This is on top of our commitment to implement a four-point water plan and freeze the cost of car registration, providing further savings for families.

As the shadow minister for tourism, manufacturing and small business and having run a small business for 25 years, I know too well the dire situation in which many find themselves as a result of this Labor government's mismanagement of our state's finances and burdensome red tape. My 15 years experience in consulting directly with the tourism industry gives me a genuine understanding of the effect that this tourism downturn is having. As I travel around our great state listening to small business operators and employees, I hear tale after tale of how red tape and overregulation are crippling our 400,000-plus small business sector. In 2009 alone, this Labor government introduced 68 new acts which created 7,920 pages of new or amended legislation and passed 439 regulations and subordinate legislation at a cost to businesses of \$780 million.

In its February 2011 submission to the Queensland state budget, the Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry stated—

While the recent Queensland natural disasters will place significant downward pressure on our State's economic growth, it is important to realise that Queensland's economy was facing challenges well before the impact of the recent natural disaster events. Queensland businesses indicate that the floods and Cyclone Yasi will only exacerbate an already difficult business trading environment and that there are a number of other issues undermining the viability of Queensland businesses including the level of demand and economic activity, the level of business taxes and interest rates.

The report went on—

In summary the State Government's operating result for 2007-08 was a deficit of \$1.559 billion which was before the effects of the GFC on State revenues.

So what does the Bligh government do to address this, knowing for years that it was going down this spiral? I will tell honourable members what it did. It added another bureaucrat. That is what Labor does. It is spending another \$190,000 to \$200,000 to establish a Queensland Business Commissioner. On 15 June the Minister for Finance, the Hon. Rachel Nolan, said—

By September this year we will appoint Queensland's first-ever business commissioner, a new position to cut red tape, establish clear time frames for turning around paperwork and work closely with key business representative groups in their strategic priority areas.

She continued—

... ideally will be someone who can speak the language of both government and business.

That is right, 'ideally'; she said 'ideally'. Surely our business community deserves better. This sounds like an idea that has been quickly thrown together and that, like most things Labor does, has not been properly thought through. It is as though it were looking for Christmas stocking fillers for this budget and had a sudden flash of inspiration.

Likewise, the Minister for Tourism, Manufacturing and Small Business showed her lack of capacity to handle this portfolio by scratching for things in this budget to praise. The honourable member for Whitsunday heralded the establishment of this Business Commissioner as a key announcement, along with the huge wave of prosperity coming our way. Did she not know that DEEDI already produces the Smart Regulation Annual Reports that outline the Queensland Regulatory Simplification Plan and the Regulatory Assessment Statement System and that a small business advisory council already exists? So why is there a need for another bureaucrat? Are these agencies not doing their jobs? The government says that it has a target to cut \$150 million from compliance and administration costs by the end of 2012-13, but it is difficult to see how this will be achieved based on its past history.

Our tourism industry has been hit particularly hard, with many long-timers comparing it to the devastation caused by the 1980s pilot strike. Operators want to see some leadership from this government to restore lost confidence. After all, tourism is in the top three money earners for Queensland; it is right up there with mining and agriculture. It creates about \$9 billion each year. This government has taken the industry for granted. People in the tourism industry tell me that they are sick and tired of political grandstanding by the minister and the Bligh government, who demand to be the centre of media appearances for every announcement or initiative.

I found it quite puzzling, therefore, when the minister in her budget reply speech said that the small business, tourism and manufacturing industries were all celebrating news of this budget. However, events funding—which, by the way, does not come out of the Minister for Tourism's budget—was boosted by \$83 million over four years. But the question that is being asked by the *Financial Review* and by many others in our great state is: how will this support small businesses now? Events planning generally takes several years, as do conferences and exhibitions, not a six- or a 12-month cycle.

Speaking of events, this month the inaugural Cooly Rocks On festival was held. That replaced Wintersun, which moved interstate after 20-plus years. I would like to congratulate Bob Newman, the festival operations manager, and his team for a fantastic effort. Coolangatta and surrounding suburbs rocked for 10 days, attracting upwards of 50,000 people on one day alone. It received an initial \$30,000 grant from Events Queensland, and it is to be hoped that this funding can be continued for 2012-13 now that the money has been allocated.

Budget pickings for Currumbin, though, were very slim this year. As usual, the government created a labyrinth system for opposition members to weave through to find budget announcements for their

electorates. It is almost impossible to determine what are reannouncements, what is new funding and what is complete fabrication. Most disappointing, though, was the lack of funding for the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary wildlife hospital. Many times in this place I have spoken of this unique and precious facility and its new state-of-the-art hospital that treats over 6,500 injured wildlife annually. It costs about \$600,000 a year to run this invaluable community service for South-East Queensland, and without some help it cannot afford to continue for more than a couple of months. This miserly government has never given a cent of funding to the sanctuary, yet it funds others, like Fleays. It is obvious that Minister Kate Jones does not care about what happens to the Currumbin sanctuary or the hospital, despite several—

**Ms JONES:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I take offence at the comments made by the honourable member and I ask for them to be withdrawn. We are actually providing a loan to them so they can stay open.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms O'Neill): Order! I ask you to withdraw. The minister finds it offensive.

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I withdraw. Despite several invitations to the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary, staff there tell me that the minister has not bothered to visit it since she became minister over two years ago. In the member for Ashgrove we have a minister who is all show and no substance. Her refusal to even acknowledge the plight of this wonderful service, largely manned by volunteers, is shameful. How can she stand in this House—

**Ms JONES:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I find the comments made by the honourable member that I am 'shameful' offensive, and I ask that they be withdrawn.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Could you please withdraw and would you please confine your debate to comments that are not going to offend someone?

**Mrs STUCKEY:** I withdraw. Currumbin sanctuary staff have told me that they are very disappointed that the minister speaks about koalas but will not help the people who are trying to save them.

The Blair Athol crisis accommodation service has operated since 1978 and is still struggling to cope with the demand for assistance to help the homeless. The number of people and families at risk of homelessness has increased significantly due to the tough economic times and natural disasters. That means an increase in people seeking emergency relief for rental arrears, electricity costs, health and education. Their turn-away rates for individuals—men, women and children—will likely reach 7,000 individuals this year. The budget mentions two grants in Currumbin, but both of these are already in existence and on a three-year funding agreement. They need an increase in funding now.

I would like to take a moment to extend my sincere condolences to the family of Detective Senior Constable Damian Leeding and all of the Police Service. This tragedy shook the entire Gold Coast and reminded us just how precious life is. The Queensland Police Union president, Ian Leavers, summed up the tired, long-term Labor government's commitment to law and order in this year's budget as the worst police budget in 20 years. The Bligh government has reneged on its promise of 200 new additional police a year by cutting back to 150.

I note the allocation of \$1.5 million in funding for the new Burleigh Heads Police Beat, which is welcome news for people in the area. However, there remains a big question mark over how this facility is to be staffed. Talk on the street is that staff will be allocated by moving offices from Coolangatta and Palm Beach stations as well as from Broadbeach.

Some five million people traverse Coolangatta Airport annually, highlighting the desperate need for transport options other than cars and buses. Heavy and/or light rail and the widening of the M1 are long overdue. How can anyone believe that the Premier or any of her ministers care one iota about our ailing tourism industry or small business operators when they refuse to build necessary road infrastructure or supply trains? Projects listed in the Capital Statement attempted to deceive Currumbin into thinking the long-awaited, overpromised widening of the daily bottleneck, the M1, is nigh. It mentions '\$80.2 million to complete the widening of the Pacific Motorway, from four to six lanes, between Nerang and Stewart Road', but this is cunning trickery at its worst.

This is a fraudulent and bankrupt Labor government that has presided over the state's finances for the most part of 20 years, and this year's budget avoids any effort to address the financial crisis facing the state. Unlike Labor, Campbell Newman and the LNP will represent the interests of all Queenslanders. If we continue on the political ponzi path that has been Labor's favoured approach—buying popularity today at the expense of the future—we are all doomed to a lifetime of debt, debt so deep that a tsunami of prosperity would not shift it.