

**ADDRESS**

presented by

**ANNA BLIGH MP  
PREMIER OF QUEENSLAND**

at

**2009 ALP State Conference**

on

**Sunday 7 June, 2009  
Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre, Southbank**

## **2009 ALP State Conference**

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

State president Andrew Dettmer

State Secretary Anthony Chisholm

Deputy Premier Paul Lucas

My Ministerial and Parliamentary colleagues

Men and women of the Labor Party

## Intro

Firstly ... thank you.

... my heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you who worked so hard for a Labor victory at the State election, just 78 days ago.

... the victory belongs to you ... to the campaign workers and managers, to the volunteers ... the candidates new and seasoned ... the staffers ... and to the Labor Party.

I thank Anthony Chisholm, who did such an outstanding job in his first election as State Campaign Director.

I thank my family for their love and unwavering support.

Today, I want to acknowledge and celebrate the extraordinary effort that saw a Labor Government - in Queensland - returned for a rare fifth term.

Given the historical significance of this victory, I particularly pay tribute to many women who have worked tirelessly over the years in the party ... helping women to succeed

... women like Billie Pelling who worked to establish the Gordonvale Women's Branch of the ALP in 1963;

... whose work has given women like me the opportunity to be in a position of leadership to influence the future of our State.

I also acknowledge today the many good Members of Parliament we lost:

... members like Bonny Barry, Andrew McNamara, Di Reilly, Jon English Phil Gray and Phil Weightman all of whom worked tirelessly for their electorates, were great members of parliament & made important contributions to the public life of Queensland.

....I also acknowledge members who retired to make way for new blood. Members who know it is renewal that has always made the Labor Party strong.

Our win was historic on many fronts ... we have a mandate to govern, but it is a mandate with a message – the people of Queensland want us to do better and we have to hear that message.

## One year on

Delegates, a year ago I stood before you for the first time as Premier and said, “What a difference a year makes”.

How true that is again as we gather 12 months on.

This time last year, the south-east was still in the grips of the worst drought in its history with no end in sight.

This time last year, we were preparing to contest an election.

This time last year inflation - not unemployment - was the key economic focus of Governments around the world.

This time last year, we were dealing with a skills shortage brought on by record levels of employment.

The Mining sector was booming ... the economies of our trading partners were growing strongly.

... and Queensland had racked up its 13<sup>th</sup> straight year of record economic and population growth.

What a difference a year makes.

The speed, depth and ferocity of the global financial crisis took the world by surprise.

What began as a crisis in the US sub-prime lending market snowballed into a credit slump ... gathering momentum ... and growing into an avalanche of the worst economic conditions since the Great Depression. And it continues to get worse.

Just last week General Motors – a household name and an institution in the US business world – hit the wall.

A victim of corporate greed and excess.

We here, are not the Wall Street bankers who triggered this global recession, but we do have to deal with the fallout.

This financial crisis may be global, but its effect is being felt locally.

The broadscale job losses have been devastating ... so far 114 000 Queenslanders have been hit with unemployment. For many, it will be the first time they are without work.

And behind every pay packet is a family relying on that wage.

We have seen the perfect storm rip through our State's finances.

It is not simply a technical question of whether we are in a recession but whether our trading partners are in a position to do business.

Coal royalties are down as demand from the world slows.

Property taxes like stamp duty are down as the housing sector grinds to a halt.

And GST revenue has collapsed as people become cautious about spending.

Together, these revenues have robbed a massive \$14billion from our Budget over the next four years.

That's one third of our budget.

I have been frank with the people of Queensland about the financial challenges that face us.

That's why before the election we opened our books to the public - even though there was no requirement - or even expectation - that we would do so.

It's why I warned that things would get worse before they got better.

It's why I gave the people of Queensland a clear opportunity to choose who would lead them through this crisis;  
...to secure an outcome and give whoever won, the chance to focus all their efforts on the hard decisions that would need to be taken.

Queenslanders made their decision in one of the most unique and ideological elections in recent memory.

... an election fought over the very question of the role of Government.

Labor put the case – as it always does – that the role of Government is to lend a hand, especially when the going gets tough:

... to stand by working people

... to stimulate the economy

... to invest in building and jobs

...to provide the services people rely on

...to intervene in the economy, not step away

Our opponents also put the case always made by their side of politics:

... to cut Government

... to cut services

... to cut the building program

... to step away from economic activity

Confronted with the challenges of the global recession, we offered the electorate a Labor solution.

Along with most Governments in the world we knew we needed to continue to stimulate the economy in the short term.

Because the lessons of history have taught us that cutting activity is not the way out of a downturn.

We made what was in many ways a simple choice

...to *above all else* keep our record building program going

...to protect the 119 000 jobs it supports and continue building for Queensland's future.

And we set ourselves the task of ensuring our State comes through this global recession stronger not weaker.

...with a commitment to training and apprenticeships, so we don't again face the skills shortages of past booms

...with a commitment to developing industries of the future, like Liquefied Natural Gas and Solar energy

...with a commitment to do everything possible to get those who become unemployed back to work with initiatives like the Green Army of new jobs.

And we took the decision to enter into temporary deficit

... because it was the right thing to do

... the right path to recovery

... and because I'd rather a temporary deficit any day, than see one more person out of work.

But I also know we need to pursue the long term reforms that will restore the budget to surplus over time and regain our triple-A credit rating.

Because I **will not** be the leader that destroys Labor's well deserved reputation for responsible economic management.

I **will not** give our opponents the opportunity to paint us as reckless.

I **will not** be the Premier that allows a global financial crisis to defeat us.

Not on my watch.

So today I stand before you, having to confront the hard cold reality of being a Labor Premier in tough economic times.

And it means, less than three months on from the election, making painful choices I never imagined I'd confront.

### ***Labor's Legacy***

Our great State is 150 years old this week.  
And there are times in its history which mark great transitions.

... seismic shifts in the agenda

... seismic shifts to reflect changed times

... seismic shifts that dramatically met new challenges

And a prominent feature of our history in each of those occasions was the Labor Party.

It was Labor - led by TJ Ryan - who was elected to Parliament 100 years ago this year – that recognised the need for industrial justice in a productive economy.

It was Labor – led by William Forgan Smith who worked to pull Queensland out of the Depression with a jobs-driven capital program.

His legacy is seen in the infrastructure we rely on today: the Story Bridge, Somerset Dam and buildings at the University on Queensland ... buildings that bear his name today.

Let's consider his vision and commitment to education – all those years ago – in the context of the massive leaps in the value of knowledge in the last 100 years.

William Forgan Smith led us forward with a *new agenda* for a *new time*.

It was Labor, led by Wayne Goss, who put an end to the dark days of conservative rule and modernised Queensland when we were on the verge of being left behind forever

... who restored our reputation with electoral reforms and improved services, dragging us up to national standards and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Wayne Goss led us forward with a *new agenda* for a *new time*.

It was Labor - led by Peter Beattie who laid the foundations for the Smart State where knowledge, creativity and innovation drive growth and a better quality of life.

Again, a *new agenda* for a *new time*.

Whenever in our history there's been a great leap forward...

Whenever there's been a dramatic change for the better...

Whenever Queensland rose to meet the new challenges of the times...

... Labor was there.

Because Labor is a force for change.

Because Labor is never satisfied with the status quo.

Because Labor moves society forward.

And the time has come again for Labor to move us forward.

I stand before you, inspired by our forebears. Inspired by those who had the courage and motivation to step up to the challenges they were confronted with

... who had the courage to make tough choices ... sometimes, unpopular choices.

### **Asset Sales**

I accept there is opposition to our plan to renew Queensland's finances with a program of asset sales.

I know that these decisions have disappointed and angered many of you.

So I welcome the opportunity to explain why I believe the time is right for this reform.

Why this is a new agenda for a new century ... a new agenda for Labor to modernise state finances ... catalysed by the quake that has rocked the economies of the developed world.

As our 150 years have shown us, our goals have changed as the world has changed.

At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was appropriate for Government to own butchers and hotels at a time when markets could not provide these services to a growing regional population.

In 1915 under Premier Ryan, the State owned and ran butchers, sawmills, a cattle stations, hotels, fisheries and coal mines.

In 1926, Labor Premier William McCormack began a program of selling these entities.

That process continued through to 1929 – and was completed by the incoming conservatives.

Governments throughout history have bought and sold assets as the State's needs dictated.

It was Government last century, that provided the infrastructure needed to unlock our vast natural resources for the growth and prosperity of the State.

It was Government last century that built and operated the railways and ports to create export capacity in the coal sector when private investment could not do so.

And it was Government that developed, built and owned airports in great regional cities like Mackay and Cairns.

Because that is the role of Government

... to look ahead

... to meet the needs of its people

... to drive development, growth and prosperity

... to protect the State and nurture it for future generations

Without Government investment the Cairns and Mackay Airports wouldn't have been built when they were ... and these now vibrant regional centres wouldn't have developed as they did.

Government recently decided to sell these airports and use the proceeds to pursue a new priority for these fast growing communities – the need to build and rebuild hospitals.

The sales are complete and the private sector will invest in and take these airports to their next level ... creating secure employment and economic prosperity. Just as it needs to be with the current proposals.

I know the assets we propose to sell make us money now. Combined, they earn approximately \$280 million annually.

But to operate as viable businesses - expanding businesses in modern economy – they, in return, would require Government investment of some \$12 billion in capital expenditure.

And that's \$12 billion that can't be pumped into building schools and hospitals and roads and public transport infrastructure.

As well, that \$12 billion will cost us \$750 million year-in year-out in interest payments.

That's \$750 million a year that can't be spent on preschool teachers and cleaners, disability and childcare workers, nurses and community grants.

The time has come to again reassess and realign our public asset base with the needs of Queensland **this century** at the forefront of our minds.

This century presents us with challenges not thought possible decades ago ... and it was those challenges we sought to address during the election campaign.

We put before the people of Queensland a forward-looking agenda.

... to stare down the calamity of the financial crisis

... to do everything possible to protect and create jobs

... to tackle Climate Change and reduce our carbon footprint

... to give our children the best education system we can offer

...to create a greener and cleaner State – finding cleaner sources of energy

...to build sustainable communities, well served by public transport

... to protect our natural environment

... to build the best hospital and treatment centres

... and to maintain the enviable lifestyle than 1800 more people each week move here to find

These are the challenges that confront us and the aspirations we hold as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Crises often provide the impetus for fundamental rethinks.

This global financial crisis has caused us to examine our asset base in light of current challenges and modern priorities.

As has occurred often in our 150 year history, the circumstances we find ourselves in give us cause to realign the role of Government.

To ensure our priorities and our agenda in *this* century align with the challenges we face in *this* century.

I as Premier, and we as a movement are faced with some stark choices.

As the global recession tears through our budget and leaves us with insufficient resources to do everything ... something has to give.

Like buying a new house, with a big, but affordable mortgage, then two months later losing your job and finding out you're pregnant with triplets.

You have to find a way to pay the mortgage, the bills, the groceries, and add extra room to the house, while considering a drop in income

... so you take a good long look at what your priorities are ... you face the realities and you get on with the job.

Colleagues, there has been much debate and concern about what we want to do ... much less on what we won't do:

**I won't shelve major projects**

**I won't stop our record building program**

**I won't increase taxes when businesses and families can least afford it**

**I won't cut the services Queenslanders rely on in education, health, public transport**

**I won't renege on the agreements we have made with our workforce and cut or freeze wages**

**I won't cut rebates for Seniors**

**I won't cut grants to non-government services like respite care workers for disabled children**

But, I will stay faithful to our election commitment to see this State through this wretched recession.

I have made some tough calls recently – calls I never imagined I'd be confronted with - but if there are choices to be made, I will make them.

Do we continue to haul coal for private multinational coal companies?

Or do we build new passenger rail networks and more buses for urban and regional Queensland.

Do we continue to own a forest plantation and buy and sell timber?

Or do we finish building and rebuilding major hospitals in Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Mt Isa, Brisbane, Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast

Do we continue to own a tollway on the Gateway Bridge?

Or do we build new and safer roads in our many growth areas, like the Sunshine Coast Motorway, the Townsville.Port Access Road, Forgan Smith Bridge in Mackay, Flinders Highway upgrade & the Bundaberg Ring Road?

Do we continue to own a port?

Or do we build the new public housing and social infrastructure our State needs.

Or do we keep running these business, stop investing in them and let them run down?

These are the choices. Doing nothing is not a choice

Labor's historic mission has always been to protect the most vulnerable, support the less privileged and help people in need.

I know that I am part of a movement that does not shirk its responsibilities no matter how hard they are.

As Premier, I committed to lead a Government that would work hard every day of this term for a return to prosperity.

And in doing so determine what role Government needs to play to face the challenges ahead.

To do nothing, is not an option.

Keeping Queensland strong in the current environment demands new thinking.

New thinking in science ... in economics ... in public policy ... in education ... in employment.

It demands new thinking from Government and it demands new thinking from the Labor Party.

Labor is the Party of reform, it is Labor that builds and renews and takes the agenda forward.

But change is hard.

Change demands that we challenge ourselves to think differently, that we challenge the status quo, that we shake long held beliefs.

Leadership in tough times requires tough decisions ... and your Government is up to those tough decisions.

Just as I committed to the renewal of the Cabinet and the renewal of the Government – we as a Party have to commit to renew our policies, to renew our thinking.

These asset sales are not a short term fix for a short term problem. They fundamentally reform what Government does in a modern Queensland.

They secure our ability to invest in new areas of Government activity – in new forms of clean energy, in new forms of public transport, in cutting edge technology and communications for communities, in new industries and groundbreaking areas of knowledge.

They secure what people want from Labor governments, better schools, better hospitals, better roads and safer neighbourhoods.

And I say to you with all sincerity, these are not decisions I have taken lightly.

These economic circumstances are not of our making ... but I will do whatever it takes to ensure Queensland stays on the right track.

Together, we have to seize this moment ... to move the State forward with a new agenda ... an agenda for this century.

And that means working towards the recovery.

Working

Friends, I know that what I ask seems impossible for many of you, but I seek your support to modernize Queensland and take our great State forward.