



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Main Committee**

**BILLS**

**Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2011-2012**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 25 May 2011**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Wednesday, 25 May 2011  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Marino, Nola, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Ms MARINO** (Forrest—Opposition Whip) (18:03): What will the Australian people remember about this Labor government? People will remember the massive deficits, the debt, the uncontrolled borrowings, greater taxes, unprecedented waste, appalling mismanagement and sheer unmitigated incompetence. Taxpayers know that they will be paying for this unmitigated incompetence for years and years to come. Under this government, Australia will have its biggest debt ever—record debt of \$107 billion. The government will be borrowing \$135 million a day, with daily interest payments of \$18 million. It will increase government debt with a budget deficit of nearly \$50 billion as it continues its reckless and wasteful spending. It just goes on and on.

Not only can we not afford to increase the government's gross debt ceiling from \$200 billion to \$250 billion as outlined in these appropriation bills, we cannot allow Labor to waste even more taxpayers' dollars. This government has made, unfortunately, an art form out of throwing around taxpayer dollars like confetti, wasting billions and billions on the endless litany of the latest Labor thought bubbles.

This is appallingly obscene for an Australian government. For example, the government has revealed a massive \$1.7 billion blowout in managing asylum seekers. It plans to borrow \$18.2 billion, just for starters, over the forward estimates for the NBN. It failed to provide detail in the budget about the proposed carbon tax. The Labor government's budget will add more financial stress on families and small businesses and put more pressure on interest rates. Any south-west individual family or business that has borrowed money faces increases in interest rates of up to one per cent in the next 18 months as a result of Labor's reckless borrowing and spending. But, unfortunately, Labor are totally oblivious to daily cost of living pressures or the issues facing small and larger businesses. This was graphically demonstrated by the member for Banks, who said, 'I know there is a suggestion that interest rates may go up in the next 12 months.' Well, interest rates go up and down. This just demonstrates how arrogant and out of touch the Labor government are. What an insult to every Australian who will be affected by those interest rates going up. This is the same group of small business operators, tradesmen and farmers in regional areas who will be hit by the new arrangements for taxing company cars, increasing their costs at a time when they are already doing it tough.

This budget has also failed to address the discrimination against students, classed as inner regional when they apply for youth allowance. We actually care about the higher education opportunities of all regional and rural students, not just the winners chosen by Labor. On a number of occasions the coalition introduced legislation and motions that would have allowed inner regional students to access youth allowance under the same criteria as other rural and remote students. However, Labor and the Greens voted against these measures.

The Prime Minister personally made the decision to discriminate against many students in my electorate and has had the time and opportunity to fix the problem. It is an absolute tragedy for the students and their families. They contact me constantly, but the Prime Minister has not done so and continues this discrimination at the same time she is wasting billions and billions of dollars. Regional and rural students deserve a fair go and, as many in this House would be aware, I do not intend to give up on my efforts to ensure young people have equal access to independent youth allowance.

Another focus of mine since I was first elected has been mental health issues in the south-west. At last it appears that the Labor government have followed the coalition's lead to invest in mental health. But I will keep working with key stakeholders to ensure that one of the proposed headspace facilities is actually delivered in the south-west. But Labor continues their attack on private health insurance in this budget and private health insurance is clearly on the Labor-Greens hit list. Private health insurance is not about having two tiers of service; it is about people taking personal responsibility for their health and their lives as well reducing the cost on the public health system.

The coalition want you to have a choice in your health services. Those who can or want to invest in their own health must be encouraged to do so. The coalition government encouraged people to take responsibility by

ensuring private health insurance premiums were affordable. But Labor and the Greens want to drive people out of private cover back onto the public system, which will cost taxpayers even more. It is a lose-lose situation. Many of those with private health cover will no longer be able to afford it and will not be able to choose which service that they need. Many of those without private cover will have to wait longer for services in the public system as more people leave the private system, increasing the queues. And everyone will be worse off. The Greens might be happy, however, because the agenda of eliminating choice and undermining personal responsibility will take another leap forward.

One of my top five priorities for my electorate was infrastructure and these are some of the areas where appropriately prioritised spending would have made a difference and not just been wasted by the billion. The south-west of Western Australia is a 11.9 GDP region. It could and should be producing more with billions of dollars of investment planned in the area. However, we need investment in roads, rail and the port of Bunbury. But there is no mention of federal funding to commence stage 2 of the Bunbury outer ring-road in the budget, in spite of the fact that the Western Australian government allocated \$131 million for the project in its 2011 budget. Stages 2 and 3 of the Bunbury outer ring-road were most recently costed at \$365 million, and as yet it is unfunded. These roads are a priority for the economic and social development of the south-west. I was extremely pleased to see the Liberal-led government in Western Australia invest even further in the Coalfields Highway in 2011, something the Labor Party have continually refused to do.

However, my plans and the infrastructure needs in the south-west go much further than this project and how targeted funding and prioritised funding, not wasted billions, could have assisted. Like the Bussell, Vasse, Coalfields and South Western highways, there are the important rail lines in the south-west. With the growth of mining and minerals processing in my electorate, additional capacity on the Pinjarra and Collie to Bunbury lines are required. However, the federal government are ignoring these needs. I also note that funds allocated for regional infrastructure have largely been allocated out to 2014. The government must prioritise the needs of the south-west as a matter of urgency and not continue to waste billions on other programs.

Another area rejected by the Labor government in this budget is tourism funding. The tourism sector has been in great difficulty. We have responded to their concerns with our policy to increase federal investment in Tourism Research Australia by 40 per cent—had we been elected. That would have meant another \$2.25 million. I recently took the shadow minister for tourism to the tourism hotspot of Margaret River in my electorate, where we were told by a restaurateur that they could not get the staff required to open for both lunch and dinner. How can this restaurant be profitable if it cannot open for both sittings? How counterproductive and short-sighted it was of the government to remove cooks and chefs from the skilled occupation list.

Agriculture and the environment work together. The natural symbiosis that exists between land managers who use their land purely for nature conservation and those who use their land for both agricultural production and conservation is obvious. In Western Australia more tree planting occurs on private property than on public lands, and private sector spending on salinity control outstrips government funding dramatically. It is therefore beyond belief that this Labor government should undermine both agriculture and the environment by abrogating its responsibility to protect Australia's borders against weed, pest and disease invasion at the same time as it undermines the community's ability to respond to such invasions at a local level. Unfortunately, Labor prefers to waste billions and billions of tax payers dollars rather than prioritising practical policy decisions.

Labor's 2009 federal budget slashed \$35.8 million from the quarantine and biosecurity budgets, leading to the loss of 125 jobs and reduced inspections of arriving passengers and cargo. Also, \$58 million was slashed from the Customs budget, leading to 4.7 million fewer air cargo consignments being inspected each year and 2,150 fewer vessels being bordered on arrival. This is deliberate, calculated neglect and it sets a trend which has been continued in the current budget.

In 2011 another \$32.8 million has been cut from the operational budget of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, reducing the department's capacity to deliver services to Australian agriculture. Unfortunately, the government continues to demonstrate its contempt for farmers and Australia's biosecurity by ignoring the threats to our borders. The example of the slack quarantine standards being imposed by Biosecurity Australia on the importation of New Zealand apples means, unfortunately and drastically, incursion by exotic disease is no longer a matter of if, but when.

At the same time, the Labor government has slashed the natural resource management budget going to local communities that might have been used to combat weeds and feral animals. The funding that the previous Howard Liberal government delivered to regional community groups across Australia to fund on-ground control of invasive species has been left in tatters. Clearly, this is not a priority for this government, which unfortunately would prefer to waste billions of dollars on pink batts instead of spending on practical outcomes that actually work.

Indeed, the Australian landscape, both environmental and agricultural, faces a feral future. In addition to the threat of phytophthora dieback remains ignored, with no significant action since I raised this issue a year ago. I support the amendments by the shadow minister for finance condemning the Labor government for not only increasing the government's borrowings above \$200 billion but for failing to explain the special circumstances justifying any increase. The parliament must consider and vote on proposed increases to borrowing limits every time the government seeks to increase Commonwealth debt above that \$200 billion mark. There are very serious issues that affect my electorate. Every time I see another program that involves even more waste—unfortunately, we have seen this repeated over and over by this government—I look around my electorate and I can see so many practical programs, including infrastructure and agriculture. It is the most diverse electorate in Australia—as I said, an 11.9 GDP region—and it has the capacity to grow and deliver even more. Those are the sorts of projects that the government should be engaged in, rather than in continuous wasteful spending and mismanagement and, unfortunately, the incompetence that we have seen to date.