



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**

**Budget**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 16 June 2014**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Christensen, George, MP

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**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr CHRISTENSEN** (Dawson—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (11:26): Hearing the statements of those opposite, I am reminded of the time that they were in government. It reminds me of an old story about the farmer speaking to his city cousin. They had a conversation about politics. The farmer referred to the former Labor government as fence post turtles. When the city cousin said, 'What is a fence post turtle?', the farmer said, 'Well, he didn't get there by himself, he doesn't belong there, he doesn't know what to do up there and you just want to get the poor dumb creature down to where he belongs.' And that is exactly what the last Labor government was when it came to regional Australia.

They were put in there by these supposedly country independents—they did not get there by themselves—and when they were there they did not know what to do. There was so much mismanagement that went on and so much debt that went out of control. In fact, it was a little bit worse than that because the joke goes that they do not know what to do while they are up there. Perhaps they did not exactly know what they were doing but I suspect that some of them did when they put in a carbon tax, because there were alarm bells ringing left, right and centre about the impact that would have on regional Australia.

It has hit places like the Mackay region, which I represent—a regional town—perhaps the worst. In the Deloitte Access Economics report that was done into carbon pricing, they clearly flagged with the previous government that Queensland would be worse off and that regions in Queensland would be worse off. They were intent—these guys who are talking now about how concerned they are about regional Australia—on bringing in a carbon tax on diesel fuel, putting diesel fuel costs up through the roof. And who would be paying? Regional Australia, where freight is so important.

This is something that we have had from the Labor Party, who now come in here with this hypocritical stance that they are somehow concerned about regional Australia. There was no sign of that when they were in government. In fact, the regional ministers were all city based. Why did they not give it to a country based MP? Why was it Sydney members who had it? Why was the member for Grayndler the minister for the regions? He probably would not know a cow from a horse if you took him out west. This is the ridiculous situation that the Labor Party had us in. In fact, a while ago, he was in the other chamber denying that he was the regional minister, so I wonder what he was doing for three or four months while he was there?

But if we want to talk about what the government is doing for regional Australia, it is actually quite positive. We have a number of programs that we are rolling out which were announced in this budget and that are going to pay huge dividends for regional Australia. The building stronger regional communications fund is something that is extremely important: mobile phone funding, for the first time in a long time, helping communities get that communication that they vitally need. The National Stronger Regions Fund: \$1 billion. This fund will be up and running by next year, targeting infrastructure projects supporting local and regional development. Organisations, including councils, can apply for grants from \$20,000 through to \$10 million for key community infrastructure—infrastructure that was neglected under Labor. Right now we are spending \$314 million on the Community Development Grants program, delivering things such as an upgrade to the gymnastics centre in Mackay. We have \$2½ billion that we have put forward for something that country people realise is vitally important—local roads—through a boost to the Roads to Recovery program. This includes \$350 million extra, doubling funding in 2015-16 for local councils. I have to say I know the Deputy Prime Minister addressed local councils this morning. There was applause and much nodding of the heads when he told them about that \$350 million extra that is going in for 2015-16. If the members opposite wanted to support something, they would get behind that because that is going to be a big win for all of their councils, not just city based ones.

Debate adjourned.