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Address-in-Reply

SPEECH

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Speaker Ciobo, Steven, MP

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Mr CIOBO (Moncrieff—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (12:12): I rise in the address-in-reply debate to talk about the privilege of once again representing the people of Moncrieff. It is indeed an absolute honour for me, as it is for each of us in this parliament to have the opportunity to represent our respective electorates. Among the 150 parts of the country that are represented in this chamber, it will be no surprise that I happen to think that mine is the best. The reason I think mine is the best is that, if you were to take a survey of the 23 million Australians, I would predict that most of them would say that the Gold Coast and, in particular, some of the iconic parts of my electorate such as Surfers Paradise rank up there as being some the most quintessentially Aussie and beautiful parts of the country. So it is an absolute privilege and honour for me, coming through my fifth election, to stand here at this dispatch box in this parliament and to represent the hundred thousand or so people in the seat of Moncrieff.

The story of the Gold Coast is an interesting and evolving story. My seat, only created in 1984 and previously served by the Hon. Kathy Sullivan, has been a place of intense change over the past several decades. It is certainly one of the fastest growing regions in the country. The Gold Coast is now Australia's sixth largest city, as it has been for some time, and it continues to be a city that faces a number of unique challenges. Yes, the high pace of population growth presents a number of challenges for us in terms of our critical infrastructure—things like our roads, public transport and education. Each of these issues is of course important in the eyes of each of each of my constituents and they are important issues to me. Likewise, the health sector: a big part of the Gold Coast population is our very broadscale population demographic, but there is a particular bias in some aspects towards those aged 65 and over, and their focus on health is a key area of priority for them and therefore a key area of priority for me. The last federal election campaign provided real hope for me and for many of them, as they embraced in large numbers the coalition's plans on how to take our nation forward.

The Gold Coast, in particular Moncrieff, represents a focal point for so much of the change that we see happening across our community. Not that many years ago there was a continued focus on what was called the 'sea change', as people moved away from regional parts of the country or crowded urban areas to embrace the lifestyle that they thought went along with being someone who lived by the sea. Perhaps Bernard Salt, the famous demographer from KPMG, encapsulated best in his numerous writings over the years what it is that people are looking for and the values represented in part of that quest.

For me, in representing a seat like Moncrieff, it is the very recognition that Aussies across this wide brown land embrace a number of core values: the chance to have a go, the relaxed approach that we have to life, the view that each of us is equal and that we should basically be left alone to go about our business. I see those values played out in a city like the Gold Coast. For so many years it was Australia's holiday playground. It was our premier tourist destination and it continues to be, but there has been a stark contrast painted over the past several years between the Gold Coast that so many Australians knew and the Gold Coast that has existed over the last four or five years.

The catalyst that drove that change was the global financial crisis. We saw in my city—a small business town which has, on a per capita basis, the highest concentration of small businesses in the country—a very significant and strong headwind that continues to last today. The good news is that it is dissipating, but it is a headwind that has been there solidly and consistently throughout the past four or five years. In that respect, the message that I heard from my constituents was, 'Steve, please affect change in Canberra that can help get this nation back on its feet.' People would talk to me about their concerns, the legacy of the past six years and how the failed policies of the previous government did not set up the Gold Coast or the nation to be 'fighting fit' for the challenges we as a nation and my own city had to face.

Gold Coasters, like many Australians, did not like the fact that under Labor we saw reckless spending to an extreme not previously seen in this nation. The consequence of that spending was that we saw predictions of \$123 billion worth of budget deficits over the forward estimates in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook. We saw that the debt trajectory of this nation would have an end point of some \$667 billion unless changes were

made. They were the consequences of six years of poor economic stewardship by the Australian Labor Party. Although we can talk about broad aggregate numbers—\$123 billion worth of deficits, \$667 billion worth of debt, 200,000 extra Australians unemployed—how that actually played out in my seat of Moncrieff and on the Gold Coast was in seeing people struggling.

Australians in my seat have, in some respects, a fairly novel approach to life. Historically, that has seen them relaxed and comfortable about their lives, embracing the life that goes with living alongside what is a magnificent stretch of beach and having an approach to entrepreneurialism that is played out through the highest concentration of small businesses in what is Australia's small business capital, the Gold Coast. The consequences of poor economic stewardship from here in Canberra meant that small businesses were collapsing and folding at a rate we had not previously seen. The unemployment rate in my city skyrocketed. We saw investment grind to a halt, whether it was investment in new products or new services, or investment by those abroad, from places outside the Gold Coast into property on the Gold Coast. Commercial investment ground to a halt. Unfortunately, we saw commercial vacancies ran as high as 50 or 60 per cent in parts of my city. That was the legacy of six years of Labor.

The last federal election campaign was, in many respects, an opportunity for me to campaign on hope and to campaign to my Gold Coast constituents on the basis of saying, 'Let's put aside the failed policies of the Australian Labor Party, which have run up unemployment and debt, and let's embrace policies that say we must live within our means and must make astute investments that are sure to provide a dividend yield, not in a literal sense but in a figurative sense, for the people of the Gold Coast for decades to come.' That is what they wanted.

They did not like the approach of the Australian Labor Party that saw our single biggest industry—the tourism industry—shackled with billions of dollars of new taxes. They did not like the approach of the Australian Labor Party that saw our biggest single industry—the tourism industry, which is, incidentally, also our single largest employer—having to compete with other nations for Aussie holiday dollars. If people travelled to other nations, they did not have to pay a carbon tax, but if they travelled to the Gold Coast to have their holiday they did pay a carbon tax..

That was the kind of crazy policy approach that we saw from the Labor Party. It said, 'If you take a holiday abroad, you do not pay carbon tax, but, if you choose to go to the Gold Coast for your vacation, you do pay carbon tax.' It was a rejection of that kind of approach that my constituents made very clear to me, and that is what the government—and I am very honoured to be part of this government—is focused on delivering.

I hope that with the passage of time we will be able to undo a lot of damage that was done by the Australian Labor Party, but it will take time. We saw, in large numbers, support for the coalition in the Gold Coast, and I am pleased to say that that was reflected across the length and breadth of the nation. That is what led to the change of government so that now, as the Prime Minister has said on so many occasions, Australia is under new management and open for business. Even in the six months since the election, the feeling of change in the approach of the community, the attitude of its people and its general tempo is pronounced.

The Gold Coast today is already starting to emerge from the shadows of Labor and of the GFC. The Gold Coast today is seeing investment in a raft of areas, including having the Commonwealth Games in 2018. We are now only a matter of weeks or months away from the 2014 games, but there is a build up of excitement for the Commonwealth Games and for what it means for our city. We have seen consumer confidence become so much stronger than it was under the Australian Labor Party. We have seen property prices start to spur again. That is because Australians have more confidence that tomorrow is going to be a better day than today, and that is what was missing for the last six years.

In other crucial matters for my constituency we saw the ramifications—in the negative sense, unfortunately—of poor Labor Party policy decisions. Labor closed down the immigration office on the Gold Coast. The export of education was a big industry in my city, and Labor made things tougher for it by closing down the immigration office. The consequence of that is that if you are an international student studying English, for example, or undertaking vocational studies on the Gold Coast, you now have to travel to Brisbane in order to visit the department of immigration, which many are required to do on a regular and ongoing basis. I am committed to reopening that office. The challenge that we as the new government have is that we have been left with a multitude of debt, with the last budget deficit being \$47 billion, for example. So I say to the Gold Coast and to my constituents: we will reopen that service, but it is going to take time. I cannot look my constituents in the eye

and promise them that we are going to open up all of these government services that Labor shut down, because we cannot afford it. The \$47 billion worth of debt in the last budget alone means that we have to make some tough decisions to get debt under control. But once it is under control—once we have got the reckless spending stopped, which this government has been focused on doing right from day one—then we will again have money and capital available to reopen services that we know are crucial to providing the support that crucial industries, like the education export industry, in my electorate need and deserve in order to continue making money, driving employment and driving exports of Australian services.

Likewise, we saw the crazy decision of the Australian Labor Party to shut down the Australian Federal Police office on the Gold Coast. We saw, perhaps at its zenith, about 12 months ago, the reputation of the Gold Coast getting trashed and tarnished almost daily in the media. Labor's solution was to close down the Federal Police office on the Gold Coast and to rip 40 per cent out of the budget of the Australian Federal Police, because they had had their ridiculous spending sprees, handing out \$900 checks to all and sundry, they had spent money to install pink batts and then spent more money to rip them back out and they had spent money on failed schemes. There were massive cost blow-outs in their so-called border protection policies, which cost some \$11½ billion, I think. I make this solemn pledge to the people of the Gold Coast: we will get an AFP office back on the Gold Coast. I promise them that it will come back, but it is going to take time, because we have to stop that reckless spending and we have to restore our nation's finances. By doing so, we will have the money available to invest in delivering the safety and security that Australians and, in particular, my constituency of Moncrieff want and deserve.

The state government stepped up to the plate and did an outstanding job through the so-called VLAD laws. We have seen bikies pushed out of our city and pushed out of our state, and with that a lot of the crime—assaults and burglaries—that is associated with them. From memory, there has been a decline of something like 40 per cent in a number of areas, such as breaking and entering, and assaults, since those laws came into effect.

Apart from those positive plans to restore our city, the only reason I have the privilege of standing in this chamber is that so many people worked hard in my campaign, whether it was all the booth captains that did an outstanding job getting up, many of them at 3 am and 4 am, to go and work the booths or those who are what we call our roving booth captains that made sure they filled any holes that existed in terms of the booth network. We had some 300 or 400 volunteers out on polling day playing their part not only to get me re-elected but also to make sure that we saw Tony Abbott installed as the new Prime Minister of Australia. It was a success.

I want to particularly mention a few of people—it is always dangerous to do this. Peter Barlow did an outstanding job for me and has done so on numerous occasions as, let us call him, a special campaigner. He would stand on roundabouts, set up signage and do those types of things for me for literally hours on end and for weeks on end. I thank my campaign manager, Karen Embrey, and the balance of my staff: Karly Abbott, Ben Dillaway, Gloria Vicario, Jack Piggott and Jake Durrington. All of them did an outstanding job in helping to steer my campaign and to make sure that all aspects of my campaign—from the prepolls through to the polling booths, the postal votes and the mail-out campaign—ran relatively smoothly. There were a couple of hiccups with the mail campaign, but it all ran relatively smoothly. I thank them in particular not only for the outstanding work that they did during the campaign but also for the work that they do on a day-to-day basis to make sure that, when I am away at places like Canberra or I am travelling interstate, there is always a presence in my office and an open ear to the needs of my constituency, and that there is someone to deliver upon them.

I want to thank my family—my wife, Astra, and my two boys, Asher and Tennyson—who, sometimes through gritted teeth, bear the frequent absences of their father and husband doing this job down here in Canberra. It is not an easy life, political life. The demands on your time are constant and consistent and it is always family, unfortunately, that loses out in that battle. I do what I can to maintain that balance, but I want to acknowledge and honour and love my family for the privilege that they provide me in letting me do this role in this chamber. So to my family, to my staff, to my friends and to all of the party members: I thank you all for your support over so many elections, and I am grateful we were able to deliver a terrific outcome in Moncrieff, and even more importantly, to deliver a change of government here in Canberra.