



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
NATION BUILDING PROGRAM
(NATIONAL LAND TRANSPORT)
AMENDMENT BILL 2009

Second Reading

SPEECH

Thursday, 28 May 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Hayes, Chris, MP

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Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (1.05 pm)—I have to say there is nothing like living in the past and dwelling on memories of things well back in the past, particularly when those opposite did not deliver on any of this stuff. They may have wanted to just speculate at one time, but in terms of delivery I have got to say the shadow minister for transport and regional development has got a lot to answer for. They had 12 years to do the various things that he has just mentioned. They did precious little.

As I address the Nation Building Program (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2009, I note the Australian Labor Party in government has always been dedicated to building this nation. It is worth acknowledging that this has been evident over a long period of time. Any student of politics would know the values of the Chifley government and its initiation of the hydroelectricity scheme for the Snowy Mountains. It was a nation-building government. Indeed, take the Hawke government, which opened up the economy to competition, and Paul Keating's government, which introduced the Building Better Cities program. All were part of a broad range of strategies and reforms that indicated innovation, with housing programs with a renewal focus and also urban consolidation. They were big-ticket governments. I know they might get a few criticisms from the people opposite, who want to dwell in the past, but they should look at the contributions that those governments made in not only putting innovation forward but building for this nation's future. That is a vast contrast from the previous Howard administration, with its wasted opportunities. It failed to build on that tradition of nation building. It actually squandered the nation's future. We saw that with education. Its contribution to education was to rip \$1 billion out of the system. That wasn't bad, as that was their first year in government! They also managed to take billions of dollars out of the healthcare system. Those are not exactly what you would put down as nation-building efforts.

For too long national budgets under coalition governments had been short-sighted as they focused only on the next election. They continued to ignore the big challenges faced by this country. They squandered the proceedings of the mining boom and the opportunities with resources that we had. What they did not do was invest in this country's future. There just cannot be an argument about that. Those opposite cannot get up here and try to spin their way out of it. They had the time. They have a track record and, in this regard, their track record was failure.

The bill before the House today reiterates Labor's commitment to being a nation-building party. This bill should be fully supported by all members of this parliament, if they genuinely do believe in nation building. This is not like the support which was offered by the member for Sturt, the Manager of Opposition Business, in his motion of privilege yesterday. It seems that members opposite are becoming hopelessly embarrassed. When they have to visit their local electorate to talk to schools and local councils about road based infrastructure, claim credit for it and then come into this place and vote against it, it is no wonder they feel embarrassed. They should be embarrassed. People did not put those opposite into parliament to try to capture as much press as they could in their local electorates by aligning themselves with Labor led projects and then coming into this House and voting them down. That is what they have attempted to do and what they continue to do. My colleague here probably wants to have another go at it. (*Quorum formed*). I know it is embarrassing for those opposite to have to sit down and hear this and for someone to have to come in here and point out the facts.

Mr Hunt—It is embarrassing for somebody here.

Mr HAYES—Greg, I had wished that during that quorum a few of your other colleagues had turned up. I would have liked to have seen the member for Cook here. This bill is very much concerned with the issue of black spots. That is very significant and goes to the heart of this bill. Those opposite want to oppose important aspects of the Black Spot Program, as it is contained in this bill. But what do they say when it gets down to their electorates? The member for Cook just got \$50,000 for the installation of guard rails on the Pacific Highway at Sylvania. I am glad he did not run down for that quorum. The member for Paterson—big, bold Bob—is likely to do many things in this House, but he has not come in here and said how he welcomed the \$450,000 for the installation of traffic lights on the New England Highway at Metford. The member for Cowper, who during the diatribe from the Leader of the Nationals just sat behind him in the House, got \$75,000 for three separate projects on the Pacific

Highway in Clybucca, Urunga and Corindi. They made much of these projects in their electorates. They went out and tried to claim credit for these things. But the fact of the matter is that they are here, and they will be here again today, voting against this part of the program. When it comes to the issue of what this opposition should be tagged as, 'hypocritical' comes to my mind. This bill is central to the delivery of a \$26.4 billion road and rail program—the Nation Building program. The bill proposes changes to ensure the more effective provision of major road and rail infrastructure projects throughout the national network, as well as various projects that are off the network. The bill also provides for a more efficient application of the Roads to Recovery Program and the Black Spot Program. As I have mentioned, these are three projects that fall into coalition electorates now.

We need to make these changes now to make sure that we can deliver on our road and rail infrastructure program in the most efficient and effective way. This budget has been carefully crafted to stimulate the economy now to support jobs. But it has also been crafted to build the long-term savings infrastructure to ensure fiscal stability so that the net debt level of this country remains the lowest of all major advanced economies in the world. That might be a tall order, but that is something we have committed to.

Despite all the ranting and raving of the opposition, we have heard absolutely nothing yet of their plan. At this stage they like what we are doing in relation to schools—at least in the local media they like it. Yet they came in here and opposed our \$17.4 billion investment in education. They opposed the bill that led to Building the Education Revolution. They came into this place and opposed our commitment to social housing and the building of 200,000 additional houses. They also opposed the maintenance and refurbishment of existing public housing stock. They have a track record. They have already been tagged. They are hypocritical to the extreme.

They do not have a position with respect to the economy. That is pretty clear when you look at the exchanges that have occurred in the media, particularly when you contrast the views of the shadow Treasurer with those of his leader. If you listen to what they have actually said—if you listen to what the shadow Treasurer has said in relation to borrowings—you know they would be running a debt. Of course they would. Not once in the Leader of the Opposition's budget reply speech did he refer to the effect of the world financial crisis. They have tried to perpetuate this myth that the difficulties we now find ourselves in are a consequence of 18 months of a Labor government. They do not believe that. No-one in the Australian community in their wildest dreams believes that. Most people have a TV set and if they do not they read the newspaper. They actually know what is going on out there. Yet the opposition want to come in here and try to perpetuate these myths with a view to avoiding saying what they would do and simply voting against the initiatives that have been taken by the government.

I concede that the opposition leader has a very hard job. I often said that when we were in opposition. I think the hardest job in the parliament must be that of an opposition leader. Clearly, it is a difficult job. I feel sorry for the bloke.

Mr Bidgood—Chris, you're all heart, mate!

Mr HAYES—I am all heart. I have feelings too! But look at what has occurred. Nothing has occurred that has not been for someone's own personal, political interest. This is an opposition based on spin. It is not based on anything that is contributing to the national debate; it is about running a scare campaign. That is what this is opposition is about.

While I am on the topic of the opposition leader, he has one of those problems we would all love to have. I noticed in reading the *Australian* newspaper this morning that he is in the BRW top 200 list. He is one of the top-200 richest people in the country. He has assets worth \$178 million. (*Quorum formed*) I acknowledge the embarrassment I have caused the other side by what I have said. They are employing childish tactics to disrupt the parliament. They are feeling a bit precious about something. I invited William Carey Christian School to visit the parliament today, and I would hate to think that the extremely childish and precious tactics employed by the opposition would leave an indelible mark on these young people's minds about how this opposition perform. I fear that the students will take away from this debate the view that the opposition do not care about the issues in this bill—that is, that the opposition do not care about the efficient delivery of road and rail infrastructure around the country but do care about playing piddling games in this parliament. I would hate to think that young minds would be corrupted like that. I would have hoped that the opposition would have played a more responsible role in the debate and have had a contest of ideas.

I would welcome the opportunity for debate. I have been sitting here eyeballing someone on the other side who wants to have an argument about the application of this bill and what it means for their electorate. I would

like the member for Paterson to come in here, be honest and say that he would support the traffic lights for the New England Highway. The member for Cook should come in here and have the argument on whether he wants that money. I am dead sure when he talks to his local newspaper that he will have his photo on the front page and claim some responsibility for getting that \$50,000 for guardrails on the Pacific Highway. None of the people who are net beneficiaries of these programs have even had the audacity to front up in this parliament and be honest about the approach.

People listening to this debate can at least take one thing away. The Labor government are committed to nation building. We are a Labor government who are going to roll these things out. We are generating jobs and stimulating employment and demand now, but we are also providing assets and infrastructure needed for the economic future of this country. As much as the opposition hate it, they know that it is true. They know that in their heart of hearts, and that is why they all go scurrying away. They do not want to participate in this debate because they know that what we have said is absolutely right on the money.

I would like to finish by mentioning some of the benefits that I have attained in the area of Campbelltown in my electorate of Werriwa. We have done reasonably well in black spot funding. We have been able to ensure that road safety in three specific projects—one in Blairmount, one in Glenfield and one in Minto—is being taken care of. We care for the safety of those people and their families and the victims affected by road accidents. We also care about the police and emergency service people who have to attend to those accidents. *(Time expired)*