



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Bruce Highway

SPEECH

Monday, 10 October 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Albanese, Anthony, MP

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Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (17:34): It is indeed always gratifying when a political opponent is happy to acknowledge your work, and that happened on 5 March 2011, when the former Liberal member for Herbert, Ewen Jones, told the *Townsville Bulletin*: 'I'll give Labor a pat on the back and say that they have spent more in their four to five years on the Bruce Highway than we did before.' And, of course, that is the case. The Howard government, in office for almost 12 long years of infrastructure neglect, invested \$1.3 billion on the Bruce Highway. We were in office for six years and we invested \$5.7 billion so four times the amount in half the time. It is not hard to work out why Ewen Jones and other people who have actually examined the Bruce Highway acknowledge the fact that, before the election of the Labor government, there simply was not delivery.

I note that this motion asks us to accept that the government is investing \$6.7 billion on upgrading the Bruce Highway. The budget figures show that more than \$3 billion of that is not being spent this decade. So why say \$6.7 billion? Why not say \$50 billion, \$100 billion, in 2030? You know, it is just quite farcical. Indeed in this year's budget, the government cut the Bruce Highway spending by \$118 million for this financial year over what it said in last year's budget papers it would spend. If you look at the coalition government's last year's papers and then you look at the budget papers for this year, there is \$118 million less. Of course that is not surprising given that infrastructure investment tumbled by 20 per cent under this government in its first two years. But of course that has not stopped the government pretending somehow that they have been responsible for a lot of the work that is being done including of course the Cooroy to Curra upgrade that was in the electorate of the minister for transport and Deputy Prime Minister at the time. It took us to fix it up.

The Minister for Infrastructure and Transport issued a media release in April this year where he listed 24 projects that he claimed to have been delivered or commenced by the coalition government. Unfortunately for him, 23 of them were begun under the former Labor government—23 or 24, I will give some credit. The Arnot Creek Bridge near Ingham announced in February—\$10 million—was a part of the pot of funds that we put into the budget that was not allocated. It had not specifically had its funding cut.

The member for Fairfax is new and has got the new wheels on, on the new roads that Labor built. But I say to him what he should do is examine the facts on this matter and should truly advocate for additional funding because that has not happened under this government. Under this government, what we have had is essentially a magical infrastructure announcement tour in places like Rockhampton, the member for Capricornia's electorate. For projects that were well underway, the member for Capricornia has pretended that somehow there is something new to them.

This is a vital road not only for the interests of productivity for the nation but also for the interests of road safety. I have driven on parts of the Bruce Highway that have been quite clearly unsafe and that is why, for a number of the projects that are being done, road safety is absolutely critical.

I wish the member for Fairfax and other members well in getting additional money. But getting money off into the never never is not a win. The fact is, of the \$5.7 billion we had in six years, \$4.1 billion was additional investment that we promised moving forward under nation building 2 and the total there for this decade is the commitment that we had. I am very proud of our record on both the Bruce Highway and the Pacific Highway and it is a pity that it has gone back to go-slow since the change of office in 2013.