



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

BILLS

**Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2013-2014,
Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2013-2014,
Appropriation (Parliamentary
Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2013-2014**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Tuesday, 28 May 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Tuesday, 28 May 2013
Page 4180
Questioner
Speaker Husic, Ed, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (19:01): I rise to speak on the appropriation bills—bills that have been framed in an challenging economic environment. This budget seeks to chart the most appropriate course of action for the long-term prosperity of our nation. It is a budget aimed squarely at making Australia stronger, smarter and fairer through investment in infrastructure, schools and social reform. Having all but come through the biggest downturn our economy has confronted since the forties, this is the time for us to ease back on stimulus and to position the economy for the future.

It is worth noting at the outset the impact that the current economic climate has had on revenue—\$170 billion has been wiped off the revenue since the GFC. Global economic conditions now mean that companies cannot sustain their profits in the way that they once did, and this is having an impact on tax receipts. It is presenting a massive challenge for governments. It is why we had to find savings to the tune of \$43 billion but to do so in a way that does not tear at the fabric of the community.

As an MP heading into an election later this year, I know that all of us in this chamber would loved to be able to spruik for tax cuts or find other ways to inject government spending, but our balance sheet simply does not permit that and, frankly, it would represent the height of irresponsibility to do so. Instead, the government is showing fiscal restraint while keeping an eye on the things that will make Australia more productive and will grow our economy into the future.

On both sides of this chamber, in a place where we focus on division, we should find areas that unite us. On both sides of the chamber, we can all be rightly proud that the budget has provided nearly \$20 billion over the next seven years to fund DisabilityCare. In my electorate of Chifley, it could benefit as many as 3,800 people. Delivering DisabilityCare is without doubt the most fundamental social policy reform this government has seen since we introduced Medicare. For far too long, it has been reflected elsewhere that this sort of reform was considered too difficult, too hard. Now we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to meet the lifelong needs of people with a disability, their families and their carers. People with a disability have much to contribute to society, and with the choice and support that DisabilityCare will provide we can remove from many of them the barriers to their productive involvement and engagement in our society and in our workforce.

I have had many opportunities to visit disability enterprises operating in the Chifley electorate and have seen for myself the effect that gainful employment has on the people who can work. There are great organisations like the Endeavour Foundation, Mount Druitt and AFFORD in Minchinbury. In reflecting on the proposal to increase the Medicare levy, I think most people will see that increasing the Medicare levy to help fund DisabilityCare is something that they believe is worthy of support. In fact, it was something that I spoke on in February this year. I outlined the challenges for both sides of politics in finding revenue in this climate to fund disability care, and I recognised that it simply was not there. Medicare has always provided a healthcare safety net for Australians. We are now stretching it a little bit further to provide support for the disabled, their families and their carers. It is a worthy way in which to fund DisabilityCare.

Another initiative that I am very happy to see funded in this budget is our support of nearly \$10 billion to fund schools over the next six years, to deliver our National Plan for School Improvement. It is an important delivery of the work by David Gonski. It is very much a plan to better resource every school on the base of need, improving teacher quality and supporting students to achieve their best. Our plan not only makes the distribution of funding fairer but also targets those schools facing the greatest disadvantage, some of which are located in the Chifley electorate. Schools in the Chifley electorate have all welcomed the commitment.

I was delighted last week to join Cathy Anderson, the principal of Chifley College at Mount Druitt, and her staff in celebrating our deal with the New South Wales government, where both federal Labor and state Liberals joined as one to advance education in the state of New South Wales. This month's budget will also make a tangible

difference to the lives of residents in Chifley and in the neighbouring seats of my colleagues the members for Greenway, Lindsay, McMahon and Parramatta, particularly through the funding of the WestConnex motorway.

The Australian government has made an offer of \$1.8 billion to the New South Wales government to extend the M4 motorway to the Sydney CBD and Port Botany. Improving traffic flow will mean shorter travel times to and from work, more time at home with family and reduced running costs for the daily commute. One of the biggest challenges facing Western Sydney for all levels of government is finding ways to free-up the movement of people in an area of the country where congestion is causing massive problems. Smart investment in infrastructure is important if we are to keep our economy amongst the strongest in the world and, importantly, our government has sought to put forward certain conditions on the funding.

The first is that there are to be no new tolls on sections of the motorway already paid for. It makes no sense, if we have paid for the road, that we pay again through a new toll. The second condition is that the extension has to go all the way to the CBD and Port Botany so that motorists are able to travel to their desired destinations without unnecessarily clogging up roads around the motorway. This is something the New South Wales state government did not indicate previously, which is a shortcoming of its plan. We are seeking to fix it and work with them on it.

Other measures in the budget to provide for the infrastructural needs of our community include nearly a quarter-of-a-million dollars to fix two identified traffic black spots in the electorate. This is to install, for instance, a partial median-enclosure at the intersection of the Great Western Highway and Mount Druitt Road and to install a single-lane roundabout at the intersection of Wolseley and Derby streets in Rooty Hill.

On building and investment in the National Broadband Network in Western Sydney, the budget provided extra funding for each of the six Broadband for Seniors kiosks in Chifley, so they can purchase touch-screen monitors for teaching seniors about the next generation of computer interfaces. I was particularly delighted to see an additional \$39.4 million provided on a separate initiative through the end of 2014 to extend the Active After-school Communities program. It currently has just over 1,200 children from Chifley participating in it. I got to see first-hand some of the activities of the AASC in our area, in conjunction with the Western Sydney Wanderers.

With the delivery of any budget, it is important to contrast it with plans being offered by the other side. I note today the opposition's joint party room is committed to supporting and keeping all of Labor's promised budget savings. That is one of the best endorsements a budget can get. What else does the opposition intend to do that requires scrutiny? For instance, the Leader of the Opposition has recommitted to scrapping the price on carbon but intends to keep in place all of the household compensation associated with this pricing mechanism, without indicating how it will be funded. At the same time, he will commit to paying polluters to the tune of \$5 billion under his so-called Direct Action Plan. This does not identify how that will be funded.

The Leader of the Opposition is digging an even bigger budget blackhole for himself, and Australians should rightly know what cuts he will make to fill it. He has also recommitted to his overly generous paid parental leave scheme, which will hit the nation's top 3,000 companies with a tax in order to pay—as one pensioner in the Chifley electorate identified to me, three times the rate of that person's pension—up to \$75,000 to the wealthiest of families. People in our area cannot understand how you would fund a scheme in that way. Inside his own party room, rightly so, there is a degree of disquiet about the affordability of such payments. I notice tonight there has been some reference to GST reform. It is interesting to see that the GST reform is being touted as responsible national economic reform, but when we attempt to do likewise that is the most heinous of all initiatives that could be taken. They characterise something, for instance, as a great big new tax, but when it comes to the GST then that is moderate economic reform. The way it is being characterised is interesting. The way the GST could be broadened to cover, for instance, food and other essentials will impact particularly on communities in my area. We are being softened up for a change—an increase in the GST—and ostensibly it is being driven by the states, but with the imprimatur of the federal level.

Members would also have seen at another level the spat between the member for Sturt and the New South Wales education minister over our national school improvement plan. The member for Sturt has made it quite clear that this government's record investment in schools will be cut if they win the upcoming election. What I find interesting is the strident defence of state rights provided by the coalition when it comes, for instance, to the ownership of resources, but when it comes to deals done to provide greater support for the education of our next generation the coalition will tear up deals with the states and ram states' rights into a pulp for their own political imperative. What I find concerning about the caveat that the opposition leader has placed on future cuts

to spending is that he needs to wait until the pre-election fiscal outlook before making any predictions about what will come down the track.

Come 14 September Australians will have a choice between two discrete pathways to the future. They should have the opportunity to weigh up the merits of each pathway before casting a vote and should look in close detail at not only what the opposition says it will do but the track record of incoming Liberal governments in recent times. For instance, in Queensland the LNP government set about a slash and burn process with 14,000 public sector job cuts—not just high-level bureaucrats but front-line health workers, police and ambulance officers. They are investigating selling off community parks and sports grounds and working out which schools they can close—depriving communities of important local infrastructure.

In my home state of New South Wales, the O'Farrell government implemented budget savings they conveniently overlooked reference to prior to the election. Did Mr O'Farrell, for example, tell voters that he intended to cut almost \$2 billion from education? No. When he toured suburbs of Western Sydney and assured voters he would look after them, did he tell them he would cut funding to install lifts at Doonside, Rooty Hill or Toongabbie, as the member for Greenway has pointed out? No. He did say he would tackle the cost-of-living pressures on families, but he did not tell pensioners in public housing that he intended to take away their household compensation by jacking up housing commission rents. Did he tell us that he would close the cardiac unit at Mount Druitt hospital? No. He argued that he needed to rein in spending because of the state of the budget, but the Auditor-General in New South Wales found there was an extra \$1 billion that the New South Wales Liberal treasurer had not accounted for and then refused to recommit it to support education.

I would hope electors in Chifley and Greenway pay close attention to the record of the Liberal-independent council that came to office last year in Blacktown. Again, there was no warning whatsoever of the political agenda of the Liberal council—after an extraordinary record in which successive Labor-controlled councils were debt free and delivered some of the best community and recreational facilities in the state. The Liberals have begun undoing this legacy. They have indicated that they will close essential community services and facilities or at least privatise in some cases—for example, child care—to cut spending. The Liberals on council appear to have an ideology demanding that community facilities be profitable rather than be paid for at ratepayer expense. They have flagged the closing of childcare centres, reserves and they even announced the closure of the Mount Druitt swimming pool. The president of the Rooty Hill RSL youth swimming club believes they would be in dire straits when this pool closes and that schools would be left with few options for swimming carnivals. There is a great deal of anger amongst residents about the pool's closure. For many years it has provided the community with a venue for recreation, training and competition. Residents, particularly in the part of Blacktown I represent, rely enormously on the services and facilities council provides and if Blacktown Council were to continue with this agenda I can only see people being further disadvantaged and marginalised. Probably the biggest threat to local residents is the draft local environment plan, which will see council acquire homes to make way for recreational space. This has caused great concern in our area.

None of these things were mentioned prior to the election. They tear at the fabric of our local community and undermine the investment in infrastructure. The federal government can point to investments of \$140 million in 67 schools in Chifley. Trade training centres are opening. The NBN is being rolled out. Primary care infrastructure grants are changing the way that local GP clinics are operating. The opening of a clinician's school at Blacktown Hospital will ensure that we can train more GPs and that they will stay in Western Sydney. Contrast all this with the cuts to education by the state government—either to the cardiac ward at Mt Druitt Hospital and overtime in the Western Sydney health district—as well as the failure to provide for infrastructure at railway stations and council closures of community facilities such as swimming pools. All this has been done without providing support to our area. The contrast between the actions of the two governments should be concentrated upon in the lead up to 14 September. I thank the House.