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**Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2011-2012,
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SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Broadbent, Russell, MP

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Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (16:30): Today I cannot help but note that there has been an historic event in the life of the parliament in that a Prime Minister has been challenged, and in the lead up to that there were conversations between the challenger and his constituency, which were the front and back benches of the Labor Party and, to a further extent, a jump to the hearts and minds of the Australian people through the press corps and any other medium that may have been opportune for the member to get a message across. In doing so I saw a light at the end of the tunnel, that the combined wisdom of the parliamentary party of the Labor Party was looking at a review of the carbon tax through the challenger.

Having said that, it was a hope not only for Australia but for my electorate of McMillan and the electorate of Gippsland, where we are sitting on perhaps thousands of years of brown coal opportunity and all of the issues that surround the emissions controls that we need to look at as a nation, and which the world is also looking at. In the consideration that perhaps a change of leadership was to happen in this House today, one leader said, 'I would review the carbon tax if I became Prime Minister of this country again.' For me, that was a ray of hope—that some consensus of common sense might come into the debate.

Like all members of parliament I get bombarded from both sides of the emissions argument, and that is for us to deal with as we sift through the information we are given on any issue to try to come up with what is best for the nation, the Australian people and future opportunities. What I saw in this possible review was a clear intention that the road we have gone down at the moment with regard to the carbon tax is wrong for the nation on many counts. The main one is that at this time, when the dollar is at the heights that it is, our manufacturing is under pressure because of that. Growth opportunities for small business—the ideas and the research and the development that have gone into possible new products that may go onto the market across the world born out of Australian ideas and opportunities—have a pressure on them now because of the high Australian dollar. That makes it more difficult for them.

Of course, in my simple thinking if you then invade that situation with a tax that will make us more disadvantaged, you are going to come to a place where the rest of the world must be looking at us and saying, 'Why, when you supposedly have all these things going for you, are you imposing a tax in front of what the world is doing without consideration of what it is going to do to your own economy, nationally?'

You have the protagonist in the former Prime Minister saying, 'Look, there's an issue here.' So why did we have the tax in the first place?

We did not have the tax in the first place because either of the major parties desired it. That was not the reason we had the tax. We had the Prime Minister of the day, Ms Gillard, before an election campaign only 18 months ago, say, 'There will be no carbon tax under a government I lead.' Why did she say that when the broad consensus of the leadership of the Labor Party at that time was, 'The carbon tax is not for this country at this time'? She was brutal and forthright in that election campaign. She said to the Australian people many times through that same press gallery, through television and however else she wanted to get that message across, 'There will be no carbon tax under a government that I lead.' So why did we get a carbon tax? On the other side, Mr Abbott said that as sure as light follows day there will be a carbon tax. But the truth was that both parties were saying that there would not be a carbon tax, even though they had said previously that we would move towards an emissions trading scheme.

I spoke to an elderly lady the other day who said, 'Russell, we really should be doing something about our emissions.' There is concern in the community about our emissions. We get the story. But for the next 30 years we are reliant on coal. So we have some issues to deal with as a nation. Both sides of the House told the Australian people honestly that there will not be a carbon tax under the governments we lead. So why did we get a carbon tax? Why has this legislation come before the House?

Why did one of the protagonists for the leadership today say, 'I'll review the carbon tax when it is put in place'? There is concern within our business community on two counts. One: do not say you are going to do something and then not do it and do not say you are not going to do something and then do it, because that confuses all of us as to how we go about our business. Two: now that we have got the tax, we have to deal with it. But now it is suggested by a future leader of the Labor Party that it would be reviewed with a view to reducing it in order to bring it in line with the rest of the world. So, instead of the carbon tax being \$23, it would be \$5. But, hang on, you have not got the money for the compensation that you offered the people of Australia, and they still want that compensation—but you will not have the money for it.

We heard from the two previous speakers how this tax may affect individuals in their communities. That is not what I am on about. Why did we get this tax when the collective parliamentary wisdom said that we should not have it at this time because it will be detrimental to the nation? But, long term, the collective wisdom of the parliament was saying that we have to do something about our emissions. We have to do something because the Australian people gave us a hung parliament. A minority group was needed to form government. Out of 150 members in the House, one person in the House meant do or die for the Labor government. The deal was: you will give us a carbon tax or you do not get the member for Melbourne's vote.

So I say to the people of Australia and to the truck drivers who are moving across this nation at the moment, if you are feeling under threat it is not because of the collective wisdom of the parliament, it is because of a deal done with the leader of the Greens for a carbon tax. It is not an emissions trading scheme but a carbon tax set at a price that is four times the price that has been set in the rest of the world. In my simple opinion, we will be four times as disadvantaged in our dealings into the future as we would otherwise have been with an emissions trading scheme, which would balance itself with carbon trading around the rest of the world.

So all the Australian people are held hostage for this three-year period to one vote on a most important issue that affects every family and every business—every butcher, baker and life maker. And I do not think that is right. Personally, I am opposed to the carbon tax as it stands today. I am opposed to the carbon tax. I am opposed to the carbon tax because of the burden that it puts on my energy producers in the Latrobe Valley and therefore the workers in those industries—the threat to their livelihood and all that has gone before.

Some would argue that CO₂ emissions are not an issue. Others would argue that they are a future issue and that global warming is terribly important. I let the scientists argue. I am of the opinion that we should take out insurance and work towards reducing global emissions, but not throw ourselves on the altar of the green movement for the sake of holding this government together. Perhaps we should have just gone straight back to an election campaign again and had it all out, and let the Australian people decide, so that good governance could come back into this place. Now this government has done a deal with the Greens with one vote in the House, and we have a carbon tax that both parties said was inappropriate for Australia at this time. This is not the way we should be running the nation for the best.

I have heard a lot about the best interests of the Australian people. A lot of clichés have been used this week that take just about anything to mean, 'We are working in the best interests of the Australian people.' I summon all the integrity that I may have to say that I hope they are working in the best interests of the Australian people with regard to our competitiveness overseas, our exports and everything we do, including our education exports. We actually need students from overseas to come here, have their education here, take it back and in turn make their own country wealthy. But outside of saying that, this carbon tax that we are burdening upon ourselves for only political reasons, not for the good governance of the nation, is wrong, and we should be stepping back from it. If the leadership of the Labor Party had changed today, we would have been changing that within a few months. We would have been saying: 'No, this carbon tax is wrong. Yes, we can move to an emissions trading scheme, but this carbon tax that we are imposing on people right across the nation is wrong. It is wrong for the nation. It is wrong for the best outcome for the Australian people.' I know there are people overseas looking at us today and saying: 'Why are you doing this? You are crazy. It's not to the benefit of your country.'

We have not limitless resources anymore, although I believe this nation will be, once again, a wealthy nation. But one day the mining boom is going to be over, and we are going to be relying on what we produce, and what we sell, and what we grow and the other things we have on our side. What we have had on our side for a long time has been cheap electricity so we can manufacture. I am not talking about how we should be into old-fashioned manufacturing, because this nation needs to get the best it possibly can out of its education system, to put us at the forefront of what we may be exporting into the future, which is our intelligence, and we have been very good at it.

So I say to you, Deputy Speaker, today, on behalf of all Australians, that the government of the day should be taking the former Prime Minister's advice and doing a full review of our position with regard to this carbon tax, at risk of losing government. When will we have a government or a Prime Minister that puts the Australian people first, that puts the Australian economy first, that puts Australian business first? Because if you put business first, you put workers first as well—their health, their wellbeing, their future, their generations. I am keen today to make the point—I did not miss it. If Mr Rudd had been elected today, we would have had a review of this terrible tax. This tax is not good for this nation, not good for small business, not good for medium sized business and not good for big business. Therefore, it is not good for Australia. I plead with the government: have a review of this tax, have some strength, have the guts to stand up and say, 'All right, we know it's a deal with the Greens, but we are prepared to review it as a government.'