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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

BILLS

**Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2012-2013,
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Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments)
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Second Reading

SPEECH

Tuesday, 22 May 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Neumann, Shayne, MP

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Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (18:04): I warmly welcome the budget and congratulate the Treasurer for spreading the benefits of the mining boom—not just to all corners of our country but to the communities in my electorate, in Ipswich and the Somerset region—and for the much-needed relief that families and businesses will receive in this budget. The infrastructure spend, the roads spend and the assistance that is going to go to households and individuals who are pressed by cost-of-living pressures are all very important. The budget does say a lot about where the priorities of this Labor government are for middle- and low-income earners. It is a statement of our beliefs, our values, our ethics.

Those opposite do not quite get that. Those opposite wax on about dire financial Armageddon, but the truth is that our economy remains strong, with growth of 3.25 per cent of GDP and unemployment of 4.9 per cent. In my electorate unemployment is 4.7 per cent; it used to be double the national average during difficult times and now it is below the national average. Inflation is at 3.25 per cent and the tax to GDP ratio is the lowest for many years: from 25.1 per cent under the previous coalition government, when we came to office, down to 23.8 per cent this year. We have a government deficit to GDP ratio about one-tenth of that of OECD countries. We have made \$33.6 billion in savings in the budget and yet paid out \$5 billion in new payments to middle- and low-income earners.

All this is being done in the context of the kick-starting the NDIS with \$1 billion and aged-care reform with an extra \$3.7 billion, which is being rolled out for much-needed reform as a result of the Productivity Commission recommendations for both a national disability insurance scheme and aged-care reform. Apart from that there is the \$1.75 billion partnership we have undertaken with the states through the COAG process just before the budget in April 2012. All of this is in the context of the loss of about \$150 billion to \$160 billion as a result of the global financial crisis, something that those opposite never seem to mention. We have done this to provide assistance to low socioeconomic areas, areas of disadvantage and disability. For example, 150,000 more university students are studying in places like the University of Southern Queensland and the University of Queensland Ipswich campus. More students than ever before are doing tertiary and TAFE studies as a result of this government's initiative. We have got more people working now—11.5 million Australians are in the workforce. We have created on our watch 800,000 employment positions.

This is in the context of what we have seen with our fellow Western nations—the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Germany, other countries in western Europe, Canada and New Zealand—where they have lost 27 million jobs since the global financial crisis. Growth in our economy is back, whereas in a lot of countries in the Western world they are still dealing with negative growth and their economies are much slower. These are facts that cannot be denied, and that is why we have received a AAA credit rating from all three major international rating agencies.

The coalition never gives us credit in relation to that, but those are the facts about our economy. At the same time we have brought in a minerals resource rent tax which will make a difference in states like mine, Queensland. In this budget there is money set aside for one of the projects that is in my electorate that we are funding under the Regional Development Australia Fund through the minerals resource rent tax. That project in my electorate, funded to the tune of \$2 million in this budget, is the Somerset Civic Centre in Esk. Construction is already underway. I thank the Somerset Regional Council for their consultation with the local community about that project and for the financial contribution they have made to that project. It comes as a result of the fire in the Lyceum Hall a few years ago. There was only one place in the Somerset region, pre BER funded school halls, where the people in the region could meet, and that was in the Lyceum Hall in Esk. As a result of the fire there has not been a place like that. This project will bring employment and a flourishing of the arts in the Somerset region. The Esk community is an older community but it is the government administrative heart of the Somerset region and a civic centre will make a big difference. The funding is in the budget. Those opposite are against this type of funding because they voted against the funding source for this particular funding.

Further, we have given \$54 million recently to the Queensland government Main Roads Department. Jeff Weeks, the district manager in our area, tells me he has the funding for the Brassall interchange, at the intersection of the Warrego Highway and the Brisbane Valley Highway in Ipswich, which is much needed not just for my electorate, Ipswich and the Somerset Region, but also for the Lockyer Valley, Toowoomba and Brisbane. This funding has been provided. Again, that is an example of this government listening to the mayors of South-East Queensland, the businesses of South-East Queensland and also the people of South-East Queensland who have been urging for that particular thing to be undertaken for many years. It was the No. 1 priority for the mayors of South-East Queensland at the last federal election, but those opposite could not find it in themselves to make a commitment to it. Then, when it came into this parliament, the coalition voted against funding for the Blacksoil interchange.

Recently we saw the opening of the Dinmore to Goodna section of the Ipswich Motorway. Mr Albanese was there at the sod-turning of that project and he was there at the opening with my good friend the member for Oxley. Together we campaigned for that road-funding project, again supported by the councils of South-East Queensland. Of course, the coalition opposed funding for the Dinmore to Goodna section of the Ipswich Motorway for three federal election campaigns in a row. But it has now been opened and there is recognition of that funding in this budget. At \$1.76 billion, this is Queensland's largest ever federally funded road project. There are six lanes from Dinmore to Goodna, service routes down the side north and south, and it is a great funding project. It has made and will make such a difference to the lives of the people of South-East Queensland, but those opposite did not have the wit or wisdom to support this project and have campaigned against it repeatedly.

Also in my area, the Ipswich City Council continues to get funding. There is \$6.55 million for the council as Roads to Recovery funding. There is a record amount of \$1.3 million for the Ipswich City Council's road funding projects this year. In our time in government, the Somerset Regional Council has also seen an increase of about 400 per cent in Roads to Recovery funding for that region. There is \$3.2 million for Roads to Recovery across the cycle from 2009 to 2014. There is \$653,000 for the Somerset Regional Council in this budget. We will deliver more and more funding through this budget and beyond with the Regional Infrastructure Fund, comprising \$6 billion in funding targeted at states like mine, Queensland. We have large infrastructure demands in rural and regional areas and mining areas, but of course we know that those opposite, whether it was in relation to the Blacksoil interchange or other projects on the Bruce Highway or the Capricorn Highway or others, voted against the funding.

For my local area a tremendous amount of assistance has been provided in this budget as part of our clean energy package but also as part of the schoolkids bonus that we just rolled out. We are seeing 23,500 local pensioners benefiting from our historic pension reforms, including the biggest increase we have seen in pensions in 100 years. Some 23,500 local pensioners and more than 900 local self-funded retirees are receiving additional assistance in this budget. There is \$338 a year in pensions and \$510 for couples as part of the Household Assistance Package. We are seeing 4,310 local families receiving an additional \$600 annual carers supplement, boosting their assistance.

We are seeing a lot of difference in terms of family funding as well. The schoolkids bonus benefits 11,000 local families to the tune of \$410 a year for each child in primary school and \$820 for each child in high school. That adds up to about \$11 million worth of assistance for families in Ipswich and the Somerset, in my region. All up, 19,400 local kids and schools will benefit from the schoolkids bonus. Currently 2,100 families in my electorate who are missing out on the education tax refund will benefit from the schoolkids bonus. It is a shame, a tragedy and a disgrace that those opposite failed to support this legislation through the House of Representatives. But I also think the benefits we will see will be increased in superannuation. Forty-three thousand local workers, whilst we roll out the benefits under the minerals resource rent tax, will see increases in superannuation from nine to 12 per cent. That is an enormous amount of assistance to families, and it is this government and previous Labor governments which have built the superannuation scheme in this country—a \$1.35 trillion funding pool opposed length and breadth every time by those opposite, whether it is this opposition or other incarnations in previous years, when the likes of Hawke and Keating were bringing forward superannuation reforms that gave people dignity, respect and financial security in retirement.

We are also seeing important funding in help for local businesses. We are seeing local businesses receive the benefit of the \$6,500 immediate asset write-off. I had the benefit of speaking at one of those forums recently. It was put on by the Business Enterprise Centre Ipswich Region, and that was an important function. I went there and spoke to quite a lot of businesses in relation to what we are doing and the \$5,000 asset write-off. One of the things also added to the benefits is the capacity to roll forward losses in relation to that and carry forward,

and I explained that to them. I was pleased to see the Minister for Small Business speak on that particular small business futures initiative—a BECA initiative. He spoke online to people there, and I spoke beforehand. Once again we see the benefit of this.

We would have liked to give tax cuts to corporate Australia and 10,700 local businesses, but the party of Menzies—the party that parade, pose and preen as the party of business—could not bring themselves to actually vote for a tax cut for small business. They could never even bring themselves to vote for it. We knew they could not. They said they would not. They are on the record. This is a party that seem to oppose every savings measure that we want to do, says that they will give every tax cut that we want to give and says that they will provide financial assistance but will oppose every revenue source that we bring into this parliament. It is not voodoo economics they are talking about; it is magic pudding economics for those opposite. This is the party that have a \$70 billion crater in their costings, and we only discovered a \$10.6 billion hole in their costings because of a minority government situation and the fact that there were negotiations between the Prime Minister and the Independents and the Leader of the Opposition and the Independents.

But guess what. These are the people who cannot bring themselves to vote for good economic policy that helps families. In my electorate they are insulting those 11,000 families by saying to them that the mums and dads in Ipswich and the Somerset region cannot be trusted with money, because they will spend it on booze, gambling, the pokies and all kinds of stupid things. But they cannot bring themselves to be consistent, and I find that amazing about this mob opposite. You have the Leader of the Opposition saying he is going to support an NDIS. I had a forum last week at Focal Extended with the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. It was supported wonderfully. We had to explain to people there that, while the Leader of the Opposition says one thing, his shadow Treasurer will not support an NDIS, going by the words he provided at the National Press Club. So they will say one thing to one audience and another thing to another audience. They will make it up as they go along. The coalition should support these budgetary measures because they will make a difference not just in the lives of businesses but in families across the length and breadth of this country, including in Ipswich and Somerset. (*Time expired*)