



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



# **HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

## **Federation Chamber**

### **BILLS**

**Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2012-2013,  
Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2012-2013**

### **Second Reading**

### **SPEECH**

**Thursday, 14 February 2013**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Page** 1511  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Husic, Ed, MP

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**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr HUSIC** (Chifley—Government Whip) (10:02): At the outset I must thank the member for McPherson who has kindly agreed to the quick reorganisation of the speaking order, and my apologies that we did not actually communicate that to you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Given that we are both here doing our respective House duty, it is a pleasure to be able to benefit from the cooperation and assistance of the member for McPherson.

I was not planning to speak but sometimes you hear things and you just cannot help yourself. I figure that it is important for us to be able to talk about a range of things that we are doing as the government for the benefit of the Australian people, but also at the same time put a skewer to some of the myths being peddled around during this debate. I think that it is important that people have the facts on the table and are able to make up their own minds about the state of affairs when it comes to the budget.

Coming from Western Sydney as I do, whenever you talk infrastructure it is a big deal, particularly in our region where there are nearly two million people, people with a range of different needs, infrastructure is very important whether it is alleviating transport congestion, improving the spread of economic development in our City of Sydney, improving health infrastructure or education, right through to communications infrastructure.

I am reminded of a really good piece that was written by the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness Craig Emerson in the weekend's *Australian* where he contrasted the level of investment by this government in infrastructure compared to the level of infrastructure committed to by the Howard government.

He wrote about the fact, and remarks on the statistics, that this government is committed to about \$36 billion in infrastructure, drawing off the economic conditions that we have compared to when the previous government had their share of the resources boom and what they took out of that resources boom for infrastructure. It was \$7 billion under them; \$36 billion under us. The other side of politics vacated the cities. By that I mean they got rid of the urban cities program where you would have seen us working with state governments to deal with the type of infrastructure issues that exist in urban areas, be they in what you would consider as the major cities or in what the member for Groom was talking about for his neck of the woods. He made reference, Mr Deputy Speaker, to your presence at various community functions and where you wanted to see improvements in your area.

The former government never committed to working with the states on those infrastructure issues that the Reserve Bank said would create the type of capacity constraints that would hold back the economy. The bank said there were two types of capacity constraints: either failure to invest in infrastructure or a failure to invest in people's skills and that those skill shortages would lead to inflationary pressures that would hold back the economy. That is what the Reserve Bank was saying early in the last part of the last decade. The former government failed to address it adequately, and I will come back to that point.

One of the best things we could do in this nation is to invest in telecommunications—information and communications technology—but in particular the infrastructure that supports it. The NBN is hands down great for our generation in terms of infrastructure investment, which will be transformed. If you look at the study done by Deloitte Access Economics on the type of economic wealth generated by having the internet and faster broadband speeds, it is estimated to be \$50 billion today and will ramp up to \$70 billion. It also depends on what report you refer to because IBM reckons it could go up \$130 billion in due course. Either way, businesses being able to access high-speed broadband is critical.

The member for Groom used the line, 'We will do what we say we will do.'. The coalition said 19 times that they would fix broadband in this country and 19 times they failed. As the member for Groom said, 'We will do what we say we will do' but they could not even deliver broadband. I am so tired of hearing, and I am conscious of the Deputy Speaker's political affiliation, Liberal and National Party members come into this chamber and complain about poor communications in their area, yet, also in the same breath, complain about the NBN. Either they do not like it, bizarrely, or it is not coming out fast enough to their area. Or, it is in their area—as the member for

Groom said, 'I've got cable in my area and we are not connected.' Has he bothered to look at one of the 500 plans from retail service providers that allow you to connect to the NBN, give you the pricing for it and that have been shown to deliver the type of value that ADSL provides but with a faster download and upload speeds?

I would forgive the member for Groom because as he even said, he is not a technology guru; he leaves that to his daughters, as he said. But the plans are out there. They are much more efficient in the data download and they provide the faster speeds. Importantly for regional Australia—and this is why I love what we are doing with the NBN—it will not just be concentrated in the cities. The regions will get the benefit either through fibre or through wireless or through satellite. This ensures that regardless of where we live this nation can tap into modern telecommunications or broadband infrastructure to ensure that we all are able to see a benefit flow out of that.

The member for Bradfield and I are of different political views but have a deep regard for the ICT sector in this country and see the value of telecommunications to this nation. But he should not be entitled to get up in here and use terms like 'accounting trickery' when he refers to the NBN being off budget. If you look at most government business enterprises, they are not on budget. This has been remarked upon by the minister for finance on a number of occasions. This is not accounting trickery. This is a form of practice to deal with this situation that was managed by the previous government and is also respected by this government, and it is not trickery. For them, they employ these type of devices to simply mislead the public, and it is not right that it is done and they need to be called out on it. Members of the coalition mislead, for example, on the pace of the rollout, yet ignore the fact that the ACCC made a critical decision on the points of interconnecting, increasing the number from 14 to 121 and that involves massive redesigns of the network, with the size of the network that it is, and it requires time. They ignore the fact that it involves one of the biggest corporate agreements signed in recent times, the Telstra NBN agreement, that will allow access to ducts and allow us to roll out the network. It will minimise the type of disruptive work that the member for Swan was talking about earlier in his neck of the woods, to ensure that we do not have, for instance, competing telecommunication networks or broadband infrastructure running down both sides of the street, but that we use and share the existing ducts where that is possible to do so. It takes a lot of remediation work. We have a Telstra network that has been, in part, upgraded, and in other parts it is basically running into grief. This takes time. It is not mentioned by them, because there is a political objective there.

When you look at that infrastructure spend there is a lot to be proud of. Look at our healthcare agreement. In our area, in Western Sydney, I am proud of the fact that in Mount Druitt Hospital we have invested over \$2 million in new subacute beds. We invested in new equipment, in paediatric equipment and a new CT scanner for our hospital. I continue to press for an upgrade of that equipment as well, to see that we get an MRI machine in that part of Western Sydney where residents, whom I have been lobbying on behalf of, want to see improved equipment. We have invested, for example, in the Primary Care Infrastructure Grants process, whereby the Rooty Hill Medical and Dental Centre, as well as the Mount Druitt Medical Centre, are seeing investments in those practices that allow them to offer not only a wider range of hours but also a wider range of services to residents to ensure that we take the pressure off emergency departments. That is what we have invested in, and only two weeks ago the state government in New South Wales decided it would take out \$20 million from the Western Sydney Local Health District.

We are making investments. We have put in an investment into a superclinic. We have put in an investment into the UWS clinical school at Blacktown Hospital. We are trying to do things to make it easier for people to get health care. The other side of politics at the state level has basically announced it is taking funds and jobs out. We have invested in education. Sixty-seven schools in our electorates have benefited to the tune of \$137 million through the course of the BER upgrades. I suspect that in all these other non-government held electorates where we have had these investments, I am sure those opposite are turning up for the openings. I am sure they are hearing from parents and teachers what a huge difference it makes. But we still keep hearing the mantra in here when they are away from their electorates that this has been a waste of money, but not when people can see what this has done in terms of transforming education environments. For example, in my area at Bidwell Public School 30 classrooms were totally renovated. These are the single biggest investments in those schools, in terms of transforming schools, since their opening years ago. Parents and teachers can take pride in the quality of their language rooms, their science labs and their new libraries, and their multipurpose halls that allow for community activity and are able to be a focal point for communities. These are great things that are being done.

We are investing in education. We have a national school improvement plan that will see an even further investment, particularly with a focus on teacher quality. On the other side of politics at the state level, they cut

\$3 billion without even saying at the previous state election that they would do it. We are investing, they are taking away.

We are providing jobs, they are taking away—no commitment, no offer, no promise, no advice, no warning that they would cut state Public Service jobs either in New South Wales or across the border in Queensland. Now we have no commitment from them to be able to provide the type of detail that the public deserve to have leading into an election. What we have is a federal coalition saying that they would do exactly what the Queensland government did when it assumed office: create a commission of audit and then go from there. That commission of audit, as we well know, led to massive job cuts in the home state of the member for McPherson and you have seen the type of dislocation that has occurred there. The exact same recipe is being promised at the federal level, where we have a shadow Treasurer who effectively endorsed what Campbell Newman did.

We are investing in communities, we are investing in neighbourhoods, we are seeing improved health and education outcomes, we are seeing an investment in infrastructure which contrasts with the previous government, which failed to invest in infrastructure. The previous government, for example, instead of investing in TAFEs decided to create a duplicated system through its Australian training colleges and there are huge legacy issues we are trying to deal with on that. The previous government failed to invest in health and underinvested to the tune of a billion dollars and we have put that investment in. There are no commitments from those opposite other than to criticise and there is no ability to demonstrate what they do. I think people should be aware of that.

Going back to the NBN, people keen to see the plan rolled out, if they have called for fibre to the home, should not be treated so shabbily. I note here that in [delimiter.com.au](http://delimiter.com.au) the shadow communications minister referred to people who support the investment in the NBN as pro-NBN zealots who are encouraging tech savvy citizens to want the ultimate broadband. This is from the shadow communications minister, who is going around berating people because they want to get fibre to the home instead of the coalition policy, which is fibre to the node or what I like to call 'Why one-lane highways are a good idea', because effectively that is not finishing the job. We will see congestion impact on the network and we will ensure that we do not have proper investment in telecommunications technology.

We have a series of plans and a failure either on their own record previously to invest properly or a failure to demonstrate where they intend to. I am very proud of the things we have done, be it the Schoolkids Bonus, which they said they will get rid of, be it the superannuation support we have provided, where they are slugging low-income earners, be it the improvement in the tax-free threshold that they are going to get rid of—there is a whole host of things that benefit people that will be ripped away should those opposite gain government.