



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Flood Levy

SPEECH

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Speaker Bernardi, Sen Cory

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Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (5.25 pm)—Following the rather laborious contribution from Senator Furner, I was taken back to 1967, when Shirley Bassey sang that immortal number, ‘Hey big spender’, because it seems to have crept back into the Labor government’s vocabulary. The only thing they have contributed to this debate has been trying to mount a justification for taking more money out of the pockets of families. We have to ask about the integrity of their arguments. Senator Bilyk said that this government was a much lower-taxing government than those that went before it, and she quoted a percentage of GDP. What seems to have escaped Senator Bilyk and her colleagues is that they have spent \$150 billion more than they have taken in tax, which has mortgaged the futures of our children. It has placed an impediment upon every Australian family. They are going to have to repay the debt that has been established by this government.

The proposition we are debating today is very simple. It is that the mismanagement of the Gillard government of public finances will compound the cost-of-living pressures on families. It is a very simple proposition. It is very simple because the Australian people know about the cost-of-living pressures on families. It is a bit harder to understand it if you do not have a family of your own, because you are not there trying to put food on the table for your children. You are not there trying to pay for child care or living on one income. You cannot understand it until you have to live it. The fact that this government are defending their squandering of public money and saying that imposing a new tax on Australian families is not going to make it harder for them beggars belief. How can a government be so uncaring?

The government dress up their spendthrift manner, and their demands on the taxpayers’ purse, by talking about the disasters that have befallen Queensland, and they try to play an emotive card. It is very serious what has happened in Queensland. It is going to cost billions to repair it. But they are billions that we would have had they not been wasted through foolish programs, mismanagement and economic incompetence. If you need any further proof, I could give you four words: ‘pink batts’ and ‘school halls’. They have now entered the Australian vernacular as synonyms for waste and stupidity. That is what they mean. Every time you mention pink batts and school halls, people know that that was waste and stupidity at work. And yet those on the other side of the chamber have not been prepared to say this is a problem. They walk around, Mr Swan and the others, in their Mr Magoo like world that rules their fiscal calculations, talking about inflation being at 2.7 per cent. The reality is that the cost-of-living rises for families are much higher than that. Already, economists at Westpac have said that fruit and vegetable prices could rise by up to 60 per cent in the months ahead. We are seeing fuel prices much higher than they have been. We are seeing electricity prices in my state of South Australia up 12 per cent. And, due to the mismanagement in New South Wales, they are going to go up 50 per cent.

All of these things are going to hurt families, and yet the Gillard government says, ‘I don’t want to know about it; we want people to reach into their pockets and pluck out another one per cent.’ That money, the \$6 billion or \$8 billion or whatever it costs, should have been available through the government budgetary office already. The reason for that is simple: this government were left with a \$20 billion surplus. They sent it out to people in \$900 cheques. They then went into the pink batts and school halls. They then put up taxes—which, of course, were not going to affect working families; but they were taxes on cigarettes, on ready-to-drink alcohol, on family cars. We forget about that. There were increased taxes, or lower rebates, for private health insurance. This government, and those opposite, have never met a tax they did not like. They can justify it in any number of ways, but every time they do they drive another stake through the heart of Australian families. They are already doing it tough, and you want to make it tougher for them, all because you are not prepared to admit you have got it wrong, you have bungled our national finances.

I come back to my opening remarks. This is going to force Australian families for at least a generation to labour under the yoke of your mismanagement. It is incredible how much damage can be done in only three years of government. It is much more damage than was caused by the biggest floods we have seen in 30 years in Queensland, much more damage than was caused by a massive cyclone in Queensland and much more damage than was caused by bushfires in Victoria or in Western Australia. The human cost of the tragedy that you are

imposing on this country should have you hanging your heads in shame. It is an absolute disaster and all because you cannot—your party, your government—manage money.

This is a very simple premise: the Australian people expect governments to step in and help them through times of crisis. They do not expect the government to create a crisis in only three short but very painful years that is going to cost not only this generation but successive generations and make them pay. After squandering a massive surplus and accruing a record debt, which it conveniently seems to have forgotten, this Labor government is intent on imposing additional taxes. It does not want to impose just a flood levy—let us get past that for a moment—but additional taxes such as a carbon tax which it swore it would never impose; a carbon tax which Ms Gillard swore, hand on heart, ‘I will not impose’, but now she is going to impose; a carbon tax that is unnecessary, except for the fact that the government wants to take more control of people’s lives and take more money out of their pockets. It is going to put up the price of everything for families, and there is nothing the government can say to refute that because it knows it is true. But that is not all, that is not enough. It does not want to just impose a carbon tax; it also wants to impose a mining tax to make mining companies less profitable so that, possibly, there will be less exploration, less investment and less development of mines in this country, which will mean less employment. And if there are fewer people working, you know that that is going to have an impact on families.

For this government, mining is just a golden goose that can continue to be plucked. The government want to pluck the people that work in that industry as well, many of whom earn over \$100,000 and would not consider themselves wealthy. Yet Senator Furner said that those who are earning over \$100,000 a year are the fat cats and the business magnates—I am paraphrasing here. The simple fact is that the government have targeted people who want to work. Because of their incompetence, the government want to take more out of their pockets. They do not have a plan to balance the budget. I was told before that waging in the chamber is un-Senate like, but I would lay London to a brick that this government will not ever deliver a surplus, and certainly not by 2013, unless they continue to tax and impose levy after levy.

I do not want to see the burden go up for Australian taxpayers and their families. I do not want to see them have increased pressure on their family budgets. Might I remind senators that families have to live within their means. They do not have a bottomless pit of credit and they do not have access to a compliant legislature. They have to live within their means and if they spend too much money in one area they have to go without in another. That is what every family in this country does, yet the people that we should trust the most to balance the budget and to ensure that people live within their means, the Australian government, cannot seem to do so.

What is it about having \$300 billion a year to spend that causes people to spend \$400 billion or \$500 billion? What is it that causes people, when they come up to this place as part of the ALP, to close their eyes to the impact on working families? They talk, they issue rhetoric and they make promises, but when they get up here they suddenly forget what it is like—what it is like to go to the shop and have to spend twice as much money to buy some bananas or what it is like to put fruit and vegetables on the table. A 60 per cent price increase is expected in the months ahead. What does this government respond with? They respond by saying, ‘We are going to take more money out of your pocket and make it harder for you, every Australian family that is going to be hit by this levy, to pay your bills.’ It is not over yet. We are opposed to this because it is unnecessary. It is unnecessary because this is the most wasteful government in the history of this country.