



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Hansard 18 September 1998

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (12.47 p.m.): In joining in this debate today I particularly want to say how within about a day this Budget has virtually sunk without a trace in the public arena, basically because the Labor Government has not gone to too much effort to put any sort of stamp on it. The Government obviously recognises how well constructed was the coalition Government's Budget. Labor has endeavoured to copy as much of that Budget as it possibly could. The coalition's Budget was an example of good financial management.

What has not sunk without a trace this week is the issue of unemployment. During the election campaign we heard the Premier, as Leader of the Opposition, promise a 5% target. Originally the target was to be achieved in 12 months but it was extended to three years and then to five years. Unemployed people who were 18 years of age and voted at the election could be 23 before they find a job.

The Treasurer has used a figure of 8.75% as the average unemployment figure for Queensland throughout the year. He has based that figure on growth even though the rate of growth is going to decline. The Treasurer has reduced the figures for the rate of growth, but he still shows unemployment staying at the 8.75% prediction that the coalition had in its Budget.

The coalition Government was an achieving Government. We achieved an enormous amount in trade, particularly through the trade offices that we were able to establish throughout the world. It is disappointing to see that the Labor Government is concentrating totally upon Asia. There are so many other opportunities in the world in areas such as the United States of America, Europe and India. By branching out into these areas we would not have all our eggs in the one basket.

The Minister for State Development has already paid two visits to Asian countries. When he returns from his trips all he wants to do is talk about One Nation and the problems that he sees with One Nation. We have Asian business people in Queensland who say that One Nation is not the problem; the problem is of the Government's making. We want to see the Minister for State Development keeping his eyes on the game. He should stop playing politics and start to get some trade for this State. We need to see some real core business achieved for Queensland. The Minister must forget this cheap tactic of his where he comes into the House—as he did all this week—and talks about One Nation. What the Minister should be talking about is trade opportunities in other parts of the world.

Yesterday in the Parliament the Minister for State Development was exposed as having sat on a report from his director-general which showed how good the coalition's tax reform package was for exporters, for business and for reducing unemployment. Today the Minister bobbed up in Parliament with a critique of Mr Beazley's tax package. When was this critique prepared? Yesterday! It was prepared after we asked the question in Parliament. I wondered why the Minister rushed so quickly out the door after question time. The document he tabled in Parliament today is dated 17 September. It has obviously been all hands to the pumps up in the department yesterday in an attempt to put together some sort of critique so that the Minister could come in here today and defend himself.

The Minister for State Development has a heavy responsibility to stand up for Queensland, for Queensland exporters, for Queensland business and for the regional cities of Queensland, which want jobs for their young people, in an endeavour to get unemployment levels down. The Minister has the

chance—with a coalition tax reform package and a briefing which he got from his own director-general—to promote something that will make a real difference. It will reduce costs and make us competitive. We are only a small country, but we produce a lot. Our future is in exports. But the Minister sat on this issue. Then, in a cynical way, he ducked out yesterday after question time, raced up to the State Development Department, and they quickly wrote up something on the Beazley package. Obviously, the Minister did not think that it was worth getting a critique on it in the first place.

There is another very important issue within State Development and Trade at the moment. In particular, I refer to the issue of major projects, such as coalmines, power stations and the Chevron gas pipeline. I believe that all members would recognise and support the Chevron gas pipeline. An enormous amount of work was done on that project by the former Premier, Rob Borbidge, and the former Minister for Economic Development and Trade, Doug Slack. I have spoken to a number of organisations involved in that project—from the people who produce the gas to those who would build the line and those who would take the supply. They speak very highly of what the coalition did in getting that project to its current stage.

Importantly, all projects and their benefits must be able to stand on their own feet. We cannot deny other parts of the State the opportunity to also seek to get major projects in those areas. I refer particularly to projects such as the extension of the Tarong Power Station, the Wilkie Creek/Kogan Creek mine and the proposal for a power station at Kogan Creek, and the proposal for a mine and power station at Millmerran. All of these operations are run either by Government-owned enterprises—in the case of Tarong—a mix of Government-owned enterprise and private entrepreneurs, or, in the case of Kogan Creek and Millmerran, by private operators.

Here is a chance for country towns and country districts to be able to get within their own communities industries which, in the construction phase, provide for about 1,000 to 1,400 jobs and something like 60 to 80 full-time, stable jobs. That is absolutely important to those particular towns. I am sure that members can imagine the benefits that flow from 60 or 80 families who have full-time wage-earners on good, reasonable salaries: additional work comes to the district, additional teachers are required, and a boost to shopping is provided within that town or district. That is absolutely essential. I refer particularly to rural Queensland, where it is difficult to find alternative employment opportunities. I stress to this Government that, while we all support in a bipartisan way the Chevron gas pipeline, let us make sure that everything is done on a fair and even platform.

During the week, the Minister for Mines and Energy welcomed the announcement by the operators of Kogan Creek that they are ready to proceed to the next stage of their proposal for a power station in the Chinchilla district. The Minister said that that was timely. So let us stick with that; let us make sure that they get every opportunity along the way. This can be done through a proper business decision by those who are financing these proposals and making them happen, so that the people in rural Queensland get their opportunity to have some decent levels of employment within their towns.

Within this Budget there is also an allocation within the department for rural and regional communities of \$5.8m for regional forums. The Opposition will be making sure that this money is spent honestly and accurately. We do not want that \$5.8m to be just a Labor stunt—putting offices in certain Labor-held or marginal seats on the coast. It is time for these regional forums to be held in other inland parts of Queensland as well. It is time to make sure that this money is spread properly around the State, that it is not just a publicity stunt. These forums should be placed strategically throughout the State to give all Queenslanders an opportunity and, more importantly, to obtain an actual result from them. We do not want them to be only talkfests. They have to be regional forums that actually work.

I turn now to the funding cutbacks contained within this Budget. This issue has been the subject of some media attention by our Health spokesperson. I refer particularly to capital works. Some of these cutbacks relate to the Nambour Hospital, funding for which has been cut by \$3.6m; the Princess Alexandra Hospital, \$22m; the Royal Brisbane Hospital, \$4m; the Mater Hospital, \$19m; the Gold Coast Hospital, \$1m; the Maryborough Hospital, \$3m; the Caloundra Hospital, \$6m; the Toowoomba Hospital, \$3m; the Townsville Hospital, \$10m; the Rockhampton Hospital, \$3.5m; and the Redland Hospital, \$2.2m.

Earlier in this debate, the member for Nicklin rolled over and sheepishly supported the Labor Government, which has cut some \$3.5m from the capital works budget of the Nambour Hospital and \$6m, I believe, from the Caloundra Hospital, which serves many people in his electorate.

Mr Hamill: Just wrong.

Mr HORAN: In his own Budget papers, the Treasurer has mentioned the difficulties of planning, wet weather and all that. He should read his own Budget papers. The Government has delayed this project.

Mr Hamill: Wrong.

Mr HORAN: It has taken money out of the project. It has delayed the project. Instead of being a true and principled Independent, the member for Nicklin has sheepishly defended the Labor

Government. It is time that the member for Nicklin, who espouses principles and lectures members of the Parliament and the public on politicians' principles, stood up as a true Independent. We have heard him in this House second Labor Party motions. On two occasions we have heard him ask dorothy dix questions of Labor Ministers. For example, today the Minister for Education read from a prepared text. He knew what the whole question was about. If politicians are going to have principles, then if they stand for a particular party they should stand up and speak on behalf of that party.

Mr Hamill interjected.

Mr HORAN: The Treasurer is prepared to say that he is a member of the Labor Party and argue on behalf of that party. But we want Independent members to be independent and to argue on behalf of their constituents. While an Independent member takes one side and does not give fair and due recognition to the other side, and while he is prepared to be a wolf in sheep's clothing, he will receive no respect either from the members of this Parliament or the people of his electorate.

I say to the people of Nambour and all those other electorates that have had their funds cut: the Labor Government has pushed your projects back by one to two years. Your project, which was of convenience for the patients and staff at your hospital, has been pushed back by a Labor Government. Any Independent member, any Labor Party member or any National Party member worth his or her salt would fight to keep those capital works in the electorate, not just roll over and be a sycophant for the Government, which is taking millions of dollars from those electorates.

I now want to make particular comment about some issues in Toowoomba. Firstly, I refer to the police station. Similarly, in Toowoomba capital works funding for the police station has been cut back by another \$200,000 for this financial year. Once again, the project has been put into go-slow mode. With only \$700,000 allocated, we probably cannot expect to see much more than perhaps the initial plans and consultancy works done.

I also urge the Government to consider the needs of the Darling Downs with regard to water. This has enormous benefit for Toowoomba. I know that representatives from Vision 2000 have been meeting with the Minister for Environment and Natural Resources. They have a vision for the Darling Downs which impacts heavily upon Toowoomba. In Government, the coalition had some very exciting plans for the use of waste water from Brisbane. We also had other plans for water on the Darling Downs. We do have the necessary infrastructure and the necessary expertise within the agricultural community of the Darling Downs. Any water that is provided for the Darling Downs will see an immediate benefit to Toowoomba. That is something that this Government should be considering if it is going to be serious about reducing unemployment.

To the staff of the Department of Transport in Toowoomba I give a bouquet for the careful and considerate way in which they have been looking at aspects of the future usage of Tor Street and James Street in 10, 12 or 15 years' time. But what is urgently needed in Toowoomba is funding, both from the State and Federal Governments, towards the acceleration of the construction of the range crossing.

I would also like to pay compliments to our previous Minister for Sport for funding that was provided by the coalition Government for the Centenary Heights State High School swimming pool, for the hockey fields and for the Toowoomba City Council for use on the Empire Theatre and the main pool complex in Toowoomba.

In the two minutes remaining I will tell the House that spring is in the air. Tomorrow the Toowoomba Carnival of Flowers commences. Next year, that carnival becomes Australia's longest-running annual carnival. I will finish this contribution on a happy note, because tomorrow will be a wonderful day, as will Sunday and every day of the week of activities in Toowoomba. As honourable members all know, Toowoomba is Australia's most beautiful city, sitting at 2,000 feet on the top of a mountain range. I pay compliments to and thank the President of the Carnival of Flowers, Cyril Westall, who has put in enormous effort this year in some very difficult circumstances to ensure that the carnival is a success. I also pay compliments to Bob Carroll, the chief executive, and Azha Killeen, who was this year crowned the Carnival Queen. As I said, this is the 49th year of the Carnival of Flowers. Next year, in its 50th year, it will become the longest consistently running festival of its kind in Australia. It is a great carnival, based on a great city.

This week in Parliament we have seen a mixed bag. Many members have discussed the football finals that are being held over the weekend. I could not recommend anything better to the people of south-east Queensland than getting in their car and driving the hour and a half up the range to Toowoomba to the wonderful Carnival of Flowers.
