



Speech by

VAUGHAN JOHNSON

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (3.24 p.m.): I rise to speak in the debate on the appropriation Bills. I say at the outset that the Labor Government has adopted the Budget presented by the Borbidge/Sheldon coalition when in Government. There is no doubt about that. A couple of adjustments have been made here and there. A little while ago I heard the member for Crows Nest say that a couple of areas, such as Fitzroy and Toowoomba, have missed out. No doubt the local members of those areas will make reference to that. I know that the member for Crows Nest certainly will.

I will speak mainly about the issues of transport and main roads. I am somewhat pleased, to the extent that I can be pleased, that the member for Ipswich is the Treasurer. I know that he was a Transport Minister for five or six years in the Goss Labor Government.

I know just how hard it is to extract money from Treasury. I think everybody who holds a ministerial position will know just how difficult it is. I ask the Treasurer to have a soft spot for Transport and Main Roads. I hope his memory is not too short. I know that we have to be responsible about how we manage the finances of the State but, at the same time, I think every portfolio has to be treated fairly. It is all about addressing the needs of every citizen of this State. People may talk about pork-barrelling, but I can say honestly that that is something the Borbidge Government never did.

Mr Sullivan: Oh, come on. You took funding out of our areas and stuck it in your own.

Mr JOHNSON: The member for Chermside knows that it never did that. There could not be a more appropriate person to interject on me than the honourable member for Chermside. He should remember the days when he was in Government under Mr Goss. What happened in relation to the Nundah bottleneck? It was the same old situation. Funding was spun over, Budget after Budget. It was never signed off on. Who signed off on it? It was this little old mate here. Who put it into the program? It was this little old mate here, and the coalition when it was in Government.

Mr Sullivan: And who ripped it out of the RIP in February '96? That little old mate over there!

Mr JOHNSON: Did we ever get a thankyou for the Nundah bottleneck money?

Mr Sullivan: You ripped it out in February '96 in the RIP update.

Mr JOHNSON: The member for Chermside should get a hold of himself. He does not understand the situation. Transport and Main Roads is probably one of the most important portfolios in the State.

I heard the member for Cairns speak of a budget of just over \$2 billion—just over \$1 billion for Main Roads and the same for Transport. This morning I heard the ministerial statement of the Minister for Transport. He quoted me as saying that we need an extra \$300m straightaway for the upgrade of roads. We certainly do. To see that we need only look at the expansion of the sugar industry in north Queensland, on the Atherton tablelands, near the electorate of the honourable member for Cairns. There is also expansion south of Cairns.

Mr Mickel: The Logan Motorway.

Mr JOHNSON: We need \$70m-odd for the upgrade of those roads. We have a situation now in which the cattle industry is going out of that area and the sugar and fruit industries are developing

there. It is absolutely paramount that we have the associated road infrastructure in place as soon as humanly possible to cater for that heavy transportation.

There are small, wooden bridges in that area, and mums and kids in cars do not mix with B-doubles and semitrailers. I urge the Government, the Treasurer and the Transport Minister to pay particular attention to that. Not only is it an issue that impacts on the future viability of that part of Queensland but also there is a safety factor for the people of that part of Queensland who want to travel on the same roads on which goods are transported, whether it be mum taking the kids to school, kids travelling on school buses or whatever. We understand fully that, owing to weather conditions, there are only about four or five months of the year in which roads can be built in that part of Queensland. It is paramount that these programs are put in place. It is something that I worked extremely hard on when I was Minister. I know that the department is ready to go on it. I hope and pray that the Minister and the Treasurer can put together a program to assist those shires in north Queensland.

The member for Cairns mentioned the tilt train concept. The \$122m that the member mentioned will certainly cover the rolling stock, but has anyone considered the \$1 billion that will be needed to put the associated infrastructure in place? I was in the chair only a couple of months ago and I can now produce the document from Queensland Rail that will tell those opposite of the costing for that project. It is not \$122m. To fix up the unprotected crossings alone on the way to Cairns is going to cost \$33m. We must remember that we have passengers travelling at 160 km/h in this train. It is not a freight train. We are talking about human lives. There has to be a lot of infrastructure upgrading as the project is progressed.

There is one thing we should remember about trains in Queensland. Our passenger train network in Queensland is very unique. We are the envy of many people in the Western World and in Eastern Europe. We have the Queenslander and the Sunlander which run to Cairns, the Spirit of the Outback which runs to Longreach, the Inlander which runs to Mount Isa and the Westlander which runs to Charleville.

We talk about high-speed trains. The people who travel on our rail network to the north mainly do it for the romance and for the spirit of the occasion. The Government is talking about taking 15 hours off the trip to Cairns, making it a journey of some 21 hours. I give credit where credit is due and acknowledge that the former Labor Government put in place the \$600m upgrade of the railway line from Brisbane to Cairns. When the coalition was in Government we completed that project.

However, the point I make is that we have freight trains travelling on that artery at a rate of 100 km/h. If we are going to have passenger trains travelling at 160 km/h on that network there will be a cost factor. We have to look at the people who are paying for the service. Tourism is alive and well in this State. I know that the former Minister, the member for Noosa, Bruce Davidson, paid particular attention to marketing the Traveltrain concept in Queensland. International tourists will want to participate in a trip on a long distance train which will give them the spirit of the occasion.

The Government has talked of expenditure of \$1m this year and \$12m next year for the tilt train. I realise that no tenders have yet been called. I understand that Walkers of Maryborough will get the contract. What happened to Goninans in Townsville? What happened to the railway workshops? We have the National Competition Policy now. What happened to the tendering process? Is it Kelly's rules again and we simply hand out contracts willy-nilly to whoever wants them? These are the questions that the Minister for Transport and the Treasurer should answer. The Government is probably hoping to stretch the project out so that, come the next election, the people will have forgotten that promise—another broken Labor promise. I say to those opposite that they are not going to pull the wool over people's eyes. Those of us on this side of the House understand how business works. We understand how important it is to get the figures right. The Government is deluding itself if it believes it is going to build such a network for \$122m.

I remind the Minister and all Queenslanders that a daily service between Cairns and Brisbane is something that will not be utilised in the way that the Government desires. Bearing in mind the distance involved, it will probably be cheaper to take an aeroplane, anyway.

The Minister will have no option but to hide the necessary safety upgrades. I have exposed them here in the House this afternoon. If the Public Works Committee wants to undertake an investigation into something, this is probably a good subject.

I want to remind the Government of some promises on which it has reneged in relation to my electorate. My electorate of Gregory is a very remote electorate. I realise that the Minister for Transport, the member for Cook, and the Minister for Mines and Energy, the member for Mount Isa, also represent remote electorates. We talk about energy, we talk about electrification and we talk about the grid power scheme to some of the rural properties in those remote areas. I remind the Minister for Mines and Energy of just how disappointed are the people in the Shires of Barcoo and Boulia that the Government reneged on the power grid deal.

Today I spoke to Ron McGlinchey, the Mayor of Boulia Shire. I have not spoken to Peter Douglas, the Mayor of Barcoo Shire, but I can hear from here exactly what he is saying and thinking because my ears are usually burning when Mr Douglas is on the phone fighting for something for the Barcoo Shire. Mr Douglas and Mr McGlinchey are champions for their shires. For those members who do not realise, I might point out that Boulia Shire is in the electorate of the Minister for Mines and Energy. So that is the type of lip service that the people of Boulia received from their local member.

In the House earlier today I mentioned the upgrade of the Drummond Range crossing west of Emerald. The Minister paid lip service in relation to that and tried to do me over on radio 4QL this morning. The important fact——

Mr Sullivan: We heard he succeeded.

Mr JOHNSON: The important fact of the matter, my friend, is that I do not take trivial interjections.

Mr Sullivan: You just did.

Mr JOHNSON: No, I do not take them. This is about upgrading the associated arteries and the necessary infrastructure that carry the goods produced in the west to the east. The member for Chermide probably does not understand that every bullock brought in from the west provides a job for three people for one day in the slaughterhouses, whether they be in Brisbane, Ipswich, Townsville or Rockhampton. If the member for Fitzroy was here he would understand that. I know that the member for Rockhampton, the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing, would understand that as well because he has knocked around in the bush. However, there are not too many members opposite who understand the importance of rural Queensland. It is the old adage: the minority provides for the majority. That is why it is paramount that we upgrade these arteries.

In relation to the Drummond Range crossing, the \$14m was spent but the project was not completed. I urge the Treasurer—the gentleman in charge of the chequebook here in Queensland—to find the funding so that McDonald and Sons can get on with the completion of the project. In that way we will have a first-class crossing of the Drummond Range which will have an effect not only on the safety of freight and cattle trains but also on the safety of the Spirit of the Outback which travels through that opening every couple of days. It is of paramount importance for the safety of all people who use that line, including the drivers of the locomotives.

I want to return to the question of the north-west mineral province. This morning the Minister mentioned what I had already said about the \$300m shortfall. We need about \$150m immediately in the north-west mineral province to upgrade road infrastructure. Today I heard somebody talking about the rail infrastructure between Townsville and Mount Isa and the importance of interfacing with the jobs we have created in Townsville. The Borbidge Government spent considerable money in upgrading the Townsville Railway Workshops and other associated infrastructure to interface with the north-west mineral province. This allows us to provide jobs at both ends of that artery. It is important to remember that, while we are putting in that infrastructure, we are growing and we are developing the important strategic regions of this State. That is something that this Government should remember because those opposite got into trouble for their pork barrelling when Wayne Goss was Premier. The Goss Government tried to close down that associated infrastructure. The Government tried to close down one third of the State's railway lines but Rob Borbidge and I led the charge of members on this side of the House——

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Nelson-Carr): Order! The member for Surfers Paradise!

Mr JOHNSON: He was the leader—the honourable member for Surfers Paradise, the honourable Leader of the Opposition and the former Premier, Mr Borbidge—whatever the member likes to call him. And he will be the new Premier before too long—just see if I am not wrong.

The Government had to be shamed into this, just as it had to be shamed into reneging on the Maryborough Hospital last Sunday night. It is all about listening to the people. That is something that members opposite do not seem to have learnt in their two years and four months in Opposition. This Budget is about the whole of the State, not just the south-east corner. I will come back to the south-east corner——

Mr Sullivan: You forget about the south-east corner.

Mr JOHNSON: I never forget about the south-east corner. I refer the honourable member to the \$750m upgrade of the Pacific Motorway, which is a very important strategic artery in this part of Queensland. That project created something like 2,500 jobs and had wide-ranging effects on production.

Mr Sullivan: You cut the funding for the northern busways.

Mr JOHNSON: I will come to the northern busway, you clown!

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Mr JOHNSON: I withdraw that, Madam Deputy Speaker, if that would make you happier. I feel sorry for the Government when it has members of that calibre in its ranks.

The flow-on effects of the Pacific Motorway reached as far north as Hervey Bay and as far south as Coffs Harbour, with the manufacture of concrete construction units for that highway, which also created jobs. I want to mention the \$120m which the Treasurer, the Transport Minister and the Premier say was not in the coalition's Budget. It definitely was in our Budget papers. It is an old trick of Labor Governments to fudge the figures and say that things are not there. They did that with emergency services—claiming that there was a deficit when, in fact, there was an \$18m credit.

All of these things create jobs. The coalition Government created the necessary infrastructure and put it in place, whereas members opposite procrastinated. They are taking the glory for the \$16m Budget which Mrs Sheldon brought down as Treasurer. They might have changed the colour of the cover of the Budget documents from blue and yellow to red, but that is about the only difference. I notice that the member for Archerfield is wearing a maroon tunic. Perhaps she might have had something to do with the design of the cover.

Mr Schwarten: What about the toll road on the north coast?

Mr Lucas: What about the port road?

Mr JOHNSON: The toll road was one of our election promises. We gave a commitment to that. We honoured that commitment. The member for Lytton asked about the port road. The port road is something from which he and his Government walked away.

Mr Lucas: Would you build it?

Mr JOHNSON: We will be back there to build that port road. This Government has procrastinated. That road represents a very important artery to the development of this State. It is important that we get those heavy trucks through to the port of Brisbane so that business there can grow. We need that infrastructure.

Mr Mickel: What about the lifting of the toll on the Sunshine Coast?

Mr JOHNSON: I have just addressed that. Was the honourable member for Logan asleep?

As the Government undertakes its job creation program, it is absolutely paramount to recognise the importance of making absolutely certain that the associated infrastructure in rural and remote Queensland and regional Queensland is looked after while those jobs are being created in the far north, the far north-west, the south-west, the central west and everywhere else. After all, it is for the future generations of this State that we are building this infrastructure—for my kids, your kids and their kids. If we are going to make this State great as we progress into the 21st century, we have to do it collectively together.
