



Speech by

Mrs D. PRATT

MEMBER FOR BARAMBAH

Hansard 14 November 2000

FUEL PRICES

Mrs PRATT (Barambah—IND) (6.07 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to rise and second the motion moved by the member for Gladstone. The following words are not my own but those of many of the people who have spoken to me on this issue: "The Prime Minister is a liar and a thief." These are strong words, but it is also strong emotion that has forced them to be uttered.

What do the RACQ, the Motor Trades Association of Queensland, the Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Local Government Association of Queensland, Agforce, the Taxi Council, the Australian Trucking Association, the general public and most politicians in this House have in common? All are part of an alliance to present a united front to the Federal Government in an endeavour to fight the twice-yearly increase in fuel excise. They are united in their efforts to call on the Federal Government, where it has the power to do so, to recognise and act to reduce the impact of high fuel prices for petrol, diesel and LPG.

Rural and regional Queenslanders have borne the brunt of the fuel price increases since this pricing nightmare began. Unlike their city counterparts, who are also crying out for a freeze, rural and regional Queenslanders do not have the luxury of public transport to fall back on, and almost every individual relies 100% on their private vehicles. In travelling to and from Brisbane, I have yet to see any outlet selling fuel anywhere near the \$1 mark, though it is common out west. People in rural and regional Queensland also travel greater kilometres to work and to access health services and schools, to name but a few instances. They bear the greater burden of this insidious tax.

The National Party held its central council meeting in Kingaroy recently, and one of its resolutions was that it would oppose the linking of fuel excise to CPI. But it has one major problem: the Prime Minister and the Federal Government do not see a problem with this linking of the fuel excise to CPI because who would want to kill the goose that lays the golden egg? The National Party, being a minor player in the Federal coalition, with all its huff and puff will not sway a Prime Minister who has his heart set on continuing to receive huge dividends from the fuel excise to fill his coffers. It will take the combined efforts of all of us—every man and woman on the street, Independents and party members alike—to show how strong is the will of the people.

The Prime Minister has often stated that the Government has not received any great benefit from the fuel excise with the rise of fuel prices. The Federal Government receives excise on a percentage basis. The Prime Minister's stated lack of understanding of how the fuel excise link to fuel prices has given unexpected revenue to the Government has got to have the average Australian wondering just how thick is this man who is picking the pockets of men and women of this country.

Within these walls the Prime Minister's repeated assertion that there was no windfall can only be described as misleading, but outside, where the people are forced each day to reach deeper and deeper into a pocket that already has the Prime Minister's hand in it, he is being called exactly what he is.

Surprise, surprise, the Prime Minister has this week stated that he has discovered an unexpected windfall and as some sort of balm to the people of rural Queensland, who have been the worst affected, he has offered to spend \$1 billion on rural and regional roads. I have to ask: how stupid does he think the Australian people are? The Australian people are not that stupid. To the average person, a billion dollars is an awful lot of money but, from the figures supplied by the Parliamentary

Library, there are approximately 684,500 kilometres of rural or regional roads in Australia which, when the billion dollars is split up, works out to approximately \$1,462 per kilometre. As Main Roads will attest, that is not going to go very far. Queensland has 146,338 kilometres of road, which would make our share of the billion dollars—if it was shared equitably— approximately \$213,946,156. That is not really much to get excited about but, in fact, it is \$70m-odd less than the \$280m-plus the Premier wants to spend on the super stadium.

To build a normal dual carriageway in ideal conditions costs approximately \$1.2m to \$2m per kilometre, so we could expect this generous windfall to the States and Territories should give us approximately 107 kilometres of dual carriageway. Members will excuse me if I do not pop the champagne cork today.

So we ask ourselves: is this a cynical attempt by the Prime Minister to win a few votes in marginal seats by offering back some of the money that I believe the Prime Minister has stolen from the people? I respect the office of Prime Minister, but it is becoming too hard to respect the man in the chair. Nobody wanted this GST but the alternative was not attractive, either. The Prime Minister has hoodwinked the people once too often and they will not let it happen again.

To retain any credibility at all, the Federal Government must not take the people too lightly. It has been reported that in the time of Malcolm Fraser 80% of revenue raised from fuel sales was spent on roads. Today we have approximately 10%. I believe that this Federal Government could do a lot more and be a lot more generous.

I support the member for Gladstone's motion in which she has asked members to support a call to the Prime Minister to recognise the negative impacts of the escalating fuel prices on rural and regional Queenslanders and in fact all Australians.

Time expired.
