



Speech by

**Mr L. SPRINGBORG**

**MEMBER FOR WARWICK**

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Hansard 15 November 2000

### **FUEL PRICES**

**Mr SPRINGBORG** (Warwick—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (11.30 a.m.): I move the following amendment to Mr Elder's amendment—

"That Parts 1 and 3 of Mr Borbidge's amendment be reinserted".

The reason for this amendment is quite simple. At the end of the day, this Premier, who runs around Queensland—"Plastic Pete", who is pretending to be all things to all people—does not want a royal commission. What we are saying today is that, by virtue of our amendment, and then our amendment to Mr Elder's amendment, we will support the Government's motion. Not only that, we will also support the call for a royal commission in Queensland. We have taken on board the concerns raised by the Premier and his group of charlatans opposite, who seem to be so concerned about the terms of the second part of our amendment which states in part "reaffirm support for the fuel subsidy scheme". Those opposite seem to be upset by that section of the amendment which reads "implemented by the previous coalition beyond the next election".

We will take that out of the amendment. We will make this matter simple. This is about the Government and all members of this Parliament putting their names to this motion and saying that they are prepared to support the continuation of the fuel subsidy scheme beyond the next State election. We have received no commitment in that regard from the Premier or the Treasurer. That is what today's debate is all about.

**Mr HAMILL:** I rise to a point of order. The honourable member is misleading the House, because the Government is committed to subsidising fuel well past the next election and into the future. I ask that those comments be withdrawn. They are offensive because they are disparaging to the Government.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Fouras): Order! There was no reference to you.

**Mr HAMILL:** There was.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I did not hear it, I am sorry. You have made your point. I call the member for Warwick.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** The issue is quite simple. Why would the Government want to remove that section of our amendment that states that this Parliament should support the fuel subsidy scheme? Actions speak louder than words. The Treasurer has made his position quite clear.

What problem does the Government have in supporting the Opposition's amendment which starts with the words "reaffirm support for the fuel subsidy scheme". There is no problem in that whatsoever.

**Mr BREDHAUER:** I rise to a point of order. Just to make it clear, the assertion by the honourable member for Warwick that the Government has deleted the words "reaffirm support for the fuel subsidy scheme" is incorrect. For the edification of the member, that is not our amendment.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I accept what the Minister says, but the issue is that the Government must support the subsidy. It is imperative that the Government also supports the establishment of a royal commission in Queensland. It is also important that this Government supports bulk end users in this State. Bulk end users have been vilified and attacked by the Labor Party.

In Parliament this morning we saw the Deputy Premier being forced to move a motion to support the Premier. He attempted to dig the Premier out of the mire in which the Premier found himself earlier this morning. The Premier came in here with what he thought was a very good idea and he has been slated. I have not seen such behaviour from a Government since some years ago when the member for Keppel stood up to move a motion with regard to support of the bush children's scheme in Rockhampton. The guru on the other side, the Leader of the House, took on the honourable member for Keppel. We saw between 20 minutes and half an hour of complete and absolute slating of the Government. Today, we are in the same type of situation.

This Government does not want a royal commission. It also does not want to support bulk end users who have an administrative hurdle to jump over in regard to this particular scheme. The Government is running away from Parliament in December. Today the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Liberal Party called on Mr Beattie to give a commitment that the Government would have question time and run Parliament in the first week in December, which is a scheduled sitting week. We have received no commitment from the Premier on that matter. We seek a categorical guarantee that the Parliament will sit during that week.

It is quite clear that the Government is running away from what is unfolding at the Shepherdson inquiry. Those opposite are running away from the problems which are engulfing this Government in the electorate. This Government does not want to come back to Parliament in the first week of December. The simplest thing for the Government is to give a categorical guarantee that we will come back here in December and we will have question time. We need to do that because it is necessary that we keep this Government accountable for its actions.

We also need a guarantee that tomorrow members of the Government will not come in here and pull another stunt and seek to close down question time. Those opposite are running away like dingoes with their tails between their legs. They are not prepared to stand here and debate that issue.

**Mr Foley** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The Attorney-General will cease interjecting.

**Mr Veivers** interjected.

**Mr Hobbs** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I would like the member for Southport and the member for Warrego to stop interjecting. Interjections should be reasonable. I believe interjections have reached the stage of being unreasonable at the present time. I cannot hear the member for Warwick.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** This Parliament can adopt a bipartisan position. We have said that we will support the Government's motion. We do not quibble over concerns about fuel excise and calls on the Federal Government not to proceed with the fuel excise increase. We have no worries about that whatsoever. Dr Watson said that at least three or four times. Honourable members opposite are unable to understand that.

When the Premier moved his motion, those opposite made it quite clear that they did not want to hear any mention of the Opposition's involvement in the subsidy scheme. We are happy to support the motion, however, we want to see a royal commission. We also want to see bulk end users taken into consideration. Service station operators will be faced with one of the most onerous administrative processes ever.

Anyone who has spoken to service station owners understands the problems they have in their accounting process. A short time ago the Treasurer talked about business activity statements and GST compliance. These people have not seen anything yet. They are saying, "How are we going to put in place an accounting system that puts a GST on something and no GST on a subsidy system?" The Treasurer is expecting service station owners to ask someone who has a 44-gallon drum on the back of his truck whether he wants it at a subsidised or unsubsidised price, depending upon whether it is to be used on road or off road. He is also expecting bulk end users to carry their administrative costs for three months. If they owe the Treasurer anything, they have to pay within a week; if the Treasurer owes them something, it will take three months for them to be paid. They are going to carry \$80,000 or \$100,000—in some cases even more.

Farmers have not been accused of indulging in rorts, but the Treasurer is expecting them to install fuel meters on their diesel tanks. When they fill up the tractor they have to write it down. When they fill up the farm ute they have to write it down. When they fill up the farm truck they have to write it down. If a farmer has a four-wheel diesel motorbike—and there are some of them around—the same situation applies. Those opposite do not care about these things.

**Mr Horan:** You drive across the farm and then you have to go down to the paddock across the road. Then you have to count the mileage between off road and on road.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I understand that the Treasurer is moving towards installing a GPS system so that he can track everything that farmers do. He will be happy when that happens. That is the sort of nonsense that we are seeing from this Government.

I was intrigued when the guru from Woodridge, who has had a very illustrious career, started wandering around the Chamber earlier. He was carrying some sort of postcard. I looked at it, and my first impression was that written on the truck was "Townsville AWU". A little lady with a horrified look on her face was saying, "The AWU is at it again." Mr Kaiser was poking his head out of the truck and was saying, "This truck is not big enough to hold all the rorted votes." I think that is probably correct. The member for Woodridge, who was ALP State secretary when the Goss Government lost office, took the Goss Government from one of the biggest margins a Government ever had to no margin at all. That is extra special. The member for Woodridge managed to preside over that situation.

What did Labor do in response? The member for Woodridge, who now has a real question mark over his credibility, is now heading the Petrol Price Watch Committee that is looking at rorts. He should be able to track one down. He could not track an elephant through snow when it comes to ALP votes, but when it comes to tracking down the petrol companies he is right on their hammer. So far his contribution has been a postcard, a refusal to adopt a royal commission in Queensland and a refusal to speak out on behalf of those people who are going to be affected by the bulk end users scheme.

This Government talks a lot about openness, transparency and honesty, and the Premier clutches his heart and wrings his hands. He also manages to do a forward somersault with a backward pike at the same time. It is quite extraordinary to see. Just to show what a sham this whole process has been, a little while ago we wrote to the Premier and in that letter made a very simple freedom of information request. We wanted to know about all briefing notes, memorandums and correspondence—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member will resume his seat. I am going to make a general statement about the rest of the debate. It appears that it is going to be a long debate. I think the motions and the amendments are quite clear. There has been some levity given to both sides, but I am going to insist on relevance. The Shepherdson inquiry is not relevant to this debate.

**Mr Seeney** interjected.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I ask the member for Callide to apologise for reflecting on the Chair, or else I will name him under Standing Order 124.

**Mr SEENEY:** I apologise, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr SLACK:** I rise to a point of order. I seek a point of clarification. The Government used instances in which it accused the Opposition—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order. I am just saying that some general comment has been made. I want the debate to return to the motion. It is a very simple request. Relevance is fundamental to debate, so I am asking everybody to be mindful of relevance, and I will be strict on both sides. We will run the debate that way.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I am a little concerned because I do not know what brought that about. I am not talking about the Shepherdson inquiry. My FOI request was to do with all documents that the Premier's office had prepared relating to the—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** It is not relevant to this debate. That is all I am saying.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:**—fuel subsidy scheme. Mr Deputy Speaker, could you at least exercise sufficient leniency in order that I might read my own FOI request, for goodness sake? My request was for all briefing notes, memorandums and correspondence prepared by public servants and received by the Premier relating to fuel pricing, the fuel subsidy and the establishment of the operation of the petrol price watch; all correspondence received or generated by the director-general in relation to fuel pricing, the fuel subsidy and/or the establishment of the operation of the petrol price watch; and all correspondence prepared by the Premier, the director-general or any staff involved with the petrol price watch that has been prepared by Mike Kaiser, MLA. That has cost me a minute. The reply that I received stated—

"Search results

A search was conducted of the records management system and physical searches"—  
that means they have had a bit of a trawl around for all the gear they have—

"were conducted of the Office of the Director-General, the Office of the Deputy Director-General—Policy, the Environment and Resource Policy area, the Economic Policy area and the Cabinet Secretariat. Our search revealed that three files contained documents falling within the scope of your FOI application. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet holds a total of 185 folios that relate to your request."

That is not a problem. The letter states further—

"Access decision and reasons

I have decided to grant you full access to four folios. I have also decided to refuse access to 181 folios."

This is an open and accountable Government! The letter states further—

"Details of my decision are set out in the attached schedule. The date of my decision is 23 October 2000."

Okay, a couple of documents were released. I will concede that. We received four documents. Firstly, we got access to a letter of 29 June from the Cabinet Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition. We got access to that! So this is an open and transparent Government. Secondly, we got access to a letter of 19 June from the Office of the Leader of the Opposition to the Department of Premier and Cabinet—something that we could have photocopied ourselves in our own office. This is really getting to the nub of this! Thirdly, we got access to suggested terms of reference for a petrol prices inquiry. Wow! Also we got access to one of the Premier's briefing notes of 3 March when he was heading out to Roma. Everything else was denied on the basis that it was Cabinet in confidence or part of the deliberative process.

That really goes to show that from the outset this Government has been completely covering up this whole process. If there was any evidence of systematic rorting of the fuel subsidy scheme, they would have been out there prosecuting people. Quite clearly, there has been a petrol price differential between Queensland and the other States of between 8c and 10c a litre. So if there are problems with petrol pricing—and I have no doubt there are—they are not related to the fuel subsidy scheme. If there is any demonstrable evidence out there, then surely it must be possible for even this Treasurer to track down 4,000 trucks a year.

This Government has been running away from this issue. A moment ago the Honourable Minister for Transport stood up and said that petrol prices were impacting upon bus drivers. Do members know what is impacting on the bus drivers? It is this Government, because the Minister for Transport has cut their kilometre rate, because he says that they will be able to share in the benefits of the Federal tax reform scheme. There are letters that state that. The contribution of this great guru opposite, the member for Cook, has been to cut about \$18m out of Main Roads. He has gutted Mains Roads across the Darling Downs. So that is his contribution to putting money into infrastructure in Queensland. The members opposite deserve to be judged by that.

I have always said that I am concerned about fuel prices. I drive around my electorate and I know the cost. In my area petrol is not 76c a litre as it is on the Gold Coast Highway; it is 96c a litre and \$1 a litre. In the electorate of the honourable member for Gregory petrol prices are even higher. So that is what the people out there are putting up with. The members opposite do not really care, because the Ministers have their limos and their BP fuel cards and they are quite happy. They come into this place with mock—

**Mr Robertson:** As you do.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Yes, I have a fuel card, but I appreciate—

**Mr Robertson:** No, you're part of it.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** My wife still has to fill up our vehicle at \$1 a litre to take our kids to school, which is an extraordinary distance. So the members opposite come into this place with all of this mock sympathy and start to carry on.

Where does Mr Beazley stand on this issue? Is Mr Beazley saying that he wants to freeze the fuel excise? He is a former Federal Finance Minister. Keeping in mind that the automatic indexation came about as a consequence of the Keating Labor Government, where is Mr Beazley on this issue? Is he going to cap the fuel excise? He has not said that he is going to cap it.

**Mr Malone:** He was one of the guys who brought it in.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Mr Beazley sat there. He has been deaf and mute. People would ask, "So? What is the difference?" Instead, Mr Beazley is out there talking about rollback— whatever "rollback" means. How is that going to impact upon people? When the Federal Government responded to the call from the Queensland National Party for more money to go into roads, Mr Beazley said that our rural roads are fine. Any non-Government member, any Independent member, any CCA member and, hopefully, any Labor member would also understand that rural areas have some significant issues. However, Mr Beazley does not think that there are issues that should be addressed. So what is Mr Beazley's stand on this issue?

**Mr Horan:** He is pork-barrelling.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** He stands for pork-barrelling.

We know the Treasurer's form. He talks about sympathy. However, he is the bloke who tried to close one third of Queensland's rural railways. Did that hurt? It hurt a lot! The koala tunnel in the

Redlands electorate hurt. Not only did it hurt the Government; it was going to hurt a lot of people, as well as the koalas. There was also net bet. This guru's idea was to introduce a fuel tax by abolishing the subsidy scheme and reducing the rego cost but then basically jacking it back up over a period. The Treasurer was also responsible for the uniform allowance and spoke about farmers' wives going into towns in cattle trucks to pick up the milk. Those comments really go to show the understanding of this Treasurer and this Government on this issue.

We are prepared to support the Government's motion, but we want the Government to be prepared to support a royal commission that will get to the bottom of the things that it does not want to get to. A royal commission will be able to show why we no longer have a price differential between diesel and unleaded fuel when traditionally diesel has had a price advantage of 10c a litre. We have seen a significant shift in that price, to the disadvantage of diesel. They are the sorts of things a royal commission would uncover. However, as the Leader of the Opposition said, the Government does not want a royal commission because it is scared that its own policy position and its own actions are going to be exposed. I think that, by its very actions, the Government has been exposed for its lack of sincerity.

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