



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 14 November 2000

FUEL PRICES

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.16 a.m.): I move the following amendment—

Government members: Ha, ha!

Mr BORBIDGE: I am sure that those opposite will be interested because this will be a test as to who is fair dinkum or not. They should listen carefully. I move the following amendment—

"After '2001' insert the following—

- '1. and calls for a royal commission into anomalies in petrol pricing in Queensland;
2. reaffirms support for the fuel subsidy scheme implemented by the previous coalition Government beyond the next election; and'."

So therefore to—

Government members: It's a rort.

Mr BORBIDGE: No.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr BORBIDGE: The amendment continues—

"'3. calls on this Government to reverse its present policy of penalising farmers and businesses who are bulk end users.'."

Government members interjected.

Mr BORBIDGE: The boot is on the other foot now. What we are saying is that, firstly, the Premier promised a royal commission but now he does not want one. Secondly, he is now saying he will not give a commitment that if he wins the next election the fuel subsidy scheme will continue and, thirdly, he is saying that the Government is prepared to penalise farmers and businesses in Queensland who are bulk end users.

If the Government votes against this amendment, that is precisely what it is doing. There will be no guarantee from the Premier that if his corrupt Government limps over the line at the next election the fuel subsidy scheme will remain in place. There will be no commitment from this corrupt Government that this Premier will honour his option of a royal commission. So this is no longer a test of the coalition, this is now a test for Labor in this State.

Before I address a number of these concerns, I want to draw to the attention of honourable members on the Opposition side that the Leader of the House has advised the Leader of Opposition Business that if this debate is not finished by 10.30, it will go into question time. What we have is a corrupt Government that will not front up to question time, that does not want to front up in terms of Private Members' Statements and that seeks to move a motion today but will then oppose an amendment by the coalition that would have kept it honest.

I want to deal with a few issues in speaking to this particular amendment. Some time ago, the Opposition called for a royal commission into petrol pricing in Queensland—something that the Premier, the leader of this corrupt election-rorting Government, can control if he wants to. The reality is that the

Premier said at the time, "Well, if there is ongoing volatility in respect of fuel prices I am prepared to look at a royal commission."

Mr Horan: Six months ago.

Mr BORBIDGE: Six months ago, as the Deputy Leader of the Opposition says. But what does the Premier do? He wants everyone else to have an inquiry except himself because he knows that a properly constituted inquiry into petrol pricing in Queensland would be examining State Government policy as well as Federal Government policy.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BORBIDGE: The member for Toowoomba South mentions the differentials between various parts of this State. On Monday, the Shell service station at Beenleigh was selling unleaded fuel for 75.9c per litre. The BP service station down the road was selling it for 76.9c per litre. Why? Why is it 10c a litre more expensive on the Gold Coast, or Brisbane, or Toowoomba, or a host of other areas across the State? Why do we have this differential? If Shell and BP can do it at Beenleigh, why can they not do it at Toowoomba, or Mackay, or the Gold Coast, or Brisbane?

I would have thought that that would have been a primary reference to a commission of inquiry in respect of the conduct of petrol companies and oil companies in Queensland. If, as the Premier and the Treasurer are saying, the root of all evil is the GST, why is it not a problem at Beenleigh? Why is it a problem in other parts of the State, but the oil companies can deliver pre-GST fuel prices for unleaded fuel down the road at Beenleigh—half-way between Brisbane and the Gold Coast on the M1? That is one area that a commission of inquiry could address.

Of course, the Premier does not want to do that. Following the Premier's logic, if the GST and the Federal tax reforms are really the primary concern in all of this, we must assume that those policies are responsible for the low fuel prices at Beenleigh. If we follow the Premier's logic, and the twisted logic of the net bet kid beside him, that is the only solution at which we could arrive.

Let us move on to the second part of my amendment, which is—

"... reaffirms support for the fuel subsidy scheme implemented by the previous coalition Government ..."

Mr Hamill: As you would have.

Mr BORBIDGE: No, no; I will come to that. This is the fellow who said that there were 60 tankers a day smuggling fuel over the border. This is the bloke who has—how many prosecutions? He could give an Internet gaming licence to a mate but he could not prosecute any of the 60 tankers that he alleged were crossing the border. He could not find one.

But I digress. The simple fact is that part 2 of my amendment says—

"... reaffirms support for the fuel subsidy scheme implemented by the previous coalition Government beyond the next election."

It is a matter of fact that the coalition introduced the fuel subsidy scheme. All we want from this Government is a commitment that it will continue the fuel subsidy scheme even in its present form because we know that this Government, this Premier and this Treasurer tried the richest political con that any Government had tried on the people of this State for a long time when they tried to do away with the 8.4c per litre fuel subsidy scheme and replace it with a shonky concession in respect of motor vehicle registration. We know that was their intent. We made the allegation at the time that if this Premier and this Government win the next election, the fuel subsidy scheme is at risk.

This is the opportunity for the member for Brisbane Central to prove me wrong by supporting this amendment, which takes absolutely nothing away from the motion he moved but requires a degree of accountability and a degree of commitment ahead of the next election by honourable members opposite.

Mr Mackenroth: And reintroduce the rorts.

Mr BORBIDGE: The Leader of the House says, "Reintroduce the rorts." No! What I am asking the Government to do is give a commitment to honour the fuel subsidy scheme after the next election in its current form by voting for this amendment. That is what my amendment says.

Those opposite talk about rorts. The fact is that the previous legislation gave the Commissioner for Stamp Duties all the power in the world in terms of entering premises, in terms of seizing fuel tankers and in terms of seizing records. What was the end result of two years of alleged rorting as far as this Government was concerned? Not one prosecution!

Mr Horan: Sixty tankers a day.

Mr BORBIDGE: The Government said that there were 60 tankers a day crossing the border, but it could not find one. Those opposite knew that they had to build up some sort of perception of rorts so

that they could terminate the fuel subsidy scheme that was introduced by the previous coalition Government.

Mr Malone: They know about rorts.

Mr BORBIDGE: As the member for Mirani says, they know all about rorts. The Government has a PhD in rorts. That is what this motion is all about. We lose Private Members' Statements today and we lose question time. If the Premier and the Leader of Government Business—

A Government member interjected.

Mr BORBIDGE: Oh, dry up! If the Leader of Government Business in this place had had his way, we would have had 50 minutes of the Labor argument and about 15 minutes for me to respond. We are prepared to reveal and expose the absolute hypocrisy of this Labor Government in respect of fuel prices and in regard to the administration of its policies. We are more than happy to carry through on this particular debate so that honourable members opposite can have the opportunity to participate in a proper debate. I trust that we will not see the Leader of Government Business exercising what will be a record-breaking gag of debates in this place.

The other issue covered by my amendment relates to the absolutely disgraceful way in which this Government has treated bulk end users. What we have is an assumption that a bulk end user in Queensland is a criminal.

Earlier, the Premier spoke about honourable members with fuel cards and with Government cars. The fact is that even if an honourable member in this place, just as anyone else in Brisbane or the urban areas of this State, tops up his car at BP or Shell where fuel prices are now lower than they have been for ages—and I would like to know why they are lower there and not everywhere else; but that is something the Premier could address if he wanted to—we get the benefit of the 8.3c per litre fuel subsidy straightaway.

If one is a bulk end user, one does not get that benefit. If one is a bulk end user, one subsidises the Treasury of Queensland, and then four times a year the Treasury of Queensland will remit in terms of one's private use. Coupled with that is a situation where we have a total administrative nightmare in respect of every retail outlet for fuel across this State. Instead of having a reasonably simple, easy system to enforce—and contrary to what the Leader of the House said, there has been no evidence of rorting, no prosecutions under the previous Government or this Government—the Government is now seeking to police about 2,500 service stations by way of doing a profile on them all, instead of trying to manage it at the distribution level where something like 170—

Mr Rowell: These are Beattie's tax collectors.

Mr BORBIDGE: Yes. The member who is increasingly famous lately, the member for Woodridge, was handing around little postcards before. This tanker is the Beattie tanker. It is another stroke of genius by the member for Woodridge. It is on a par with his "The coalition will sell the hospitals". That was his last effort in terms of postcards and postcard distribution. I would have thought that the member for Woodridge would have learned his lesson. However, we have the Beattie tanker.

But the other matter that I wish to address this morning relates to this dreadful GST and the way in which the new arrangements entered into by the State of Queensland are causing all sorts of dreadful problems for the wonderful Beattie Government. I have a copy of the Intergovernmental Agreement. Who signed off with the Commonwealth in respect of the new arrangements? Whose signature is on the Intergovernmental Agreement? I have to admit that it is not Robert Borbidge's. The signatures on there are those of the Honourable James Alexander Bacon, Premier of the State of Tasmania; the Honourable John Wayne Olsen, Premier of the State of South Australia; the Honourable Richard Fairfax Court, Premier of the State of Western Australia; the Honourable Robert John Carr, Premier of the State of New South Wales—

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BORBIDGE: No, the Prime Minister's signature is at the top. The Honourable John Winston Howard signed on behalf of the Commonwealth of Australia. But whose signature is it? I wonder if honourable members opposite remember. It is the signature of the Honourable Peter Douglas Beattie, Premier of the State of Queensland. So the Premier moves a motion today to condemn an Intergovernmental Agreement that he signed on behalf of the State of Queensland. I can only assume that that incredible intellect on the Government side of the House, the honourable member for Chermide, has again written Labor's strategy.

In the time remaining to me, I just want to say that we accept that fuel is a major problem. We accept also that there are a number of reasons for that. Some of those reasons fall within Federal jurisdiction; some of those reasons fall within State jurisdiction. The Treasurer who tried to abolish the fuel subsidy scheme, the Treasurer who tried to abolish the 8.3c a litre subsidy, can interject all he likes. Sometime during the course of the day he, along with all his Labor colleagues, will be able to vote with

us. We are prepared to accept the argument that they are putting forward in regard to the Commonwealth, provided they accept their responsibilities as well.

The simple fact is that if honourable members opposite do not support the amendment that I have moved, then the Premier will be welshing on a commitment that he gave when he said that he was prepared to look at a royal commission. Most importantly, we will be seeing a situation where Labor in this Parliament will be voting against a reaffirmation that the fuel subsidy scheme should continue in Queensland regardless of the outcome of the next election. We will be witnessing the Labor Party in this place continuing its unfair discrimination in respect of bulk end users, many of whom have been the hardest hit by the increases in fuel prices.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr BORBIDGE: The member for Warwick referred to this allegation or this mentality that farmers are rorters. I remember the Treasurer saying that the wives of farmers will be driving their trucks into town to get the milk. That was another great achievement of the net bet kid.

If the Premier wants to kick own goals, that is his business. He has done so magnificently today. We are prepared to support that part of the motion which deals with the Commonwealth. The challenge now is for the State Government to support that part of the motion which, by way of the amendment that I have moved, deals with those matters within State jurisdiction that Premier Beattie, Treasurer Hamill and all the other honourable members opposite are in a position to support if they want to. It will be very interesting to see whether they are men of principle or whether they are just being political opportunists and hypocrites in an attempt to cover up their own electoral corruption and rorting, which is unfolding all over Queensland. If the members opposite want to make fuel the issue, then they should support my amendment and we can have a bipartisan response.
