



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

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Hansard 7 August 2001

BEATTIE LABOR GOVERNMENT

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.31 a.m.): It is time the Beattie Labor government was held accountable for its appalling record of incompetence and non-delivery of services to the people of Queensland. As I said in a speech earlier this morning, what we are seeing from this government is a concentration on the Division of Community Engagement within the Premier's department—that is, the PR department. That is the government's priority, but its priority should be delivering the day-to-day services that are so important to the people of Queensland. The delivery of the services that people expect and want is the hallmark of a good government—not self-promotion and a cover-up by a massive PR machine.

We spoke last week about the list of projects that have fallen over and that have not been achieved by this government. Today I will speak about some of the important day-to-day services that simply are not being put in place by this Beattie Labor government. This government's record is marked by its ongoing arrogance, its financial mismanagement, its underachievement and its non-delivery. The recent estimates hearings highlighted the Beattie government's lack of commitment to delivering across most departments, but particularly the Departments of Family Services and State Development.

It is a shame to see how this Premier has single-handedly turned this state's once great strong financial position right around. The result for the last financial year was an \$820 million operating deficit. That is the sort of red ink we simply do not want to see in this state. We can add to that some \$280 million of capital works funding that was not spent last year—capital works spending that would have delivered literally thousands of jobs. If we add to that the cutback we are seeing in the capital works budget, on a budget-to-budget basis, we see that this government is going down the dangerous path of taking money out of capital funding and moving it into recurrent spending. We are moving away from the sound principle that ever-increasing capital works funding was what actually drove this state and gave it the efficiencies that made people want to come to Queensland to invest.

As well as those cutbacks in capital works funding, we are seeing that Queensland prison debts have soared to some \$226 million after the Beattie government slashed a \$100 million equity injection from the corrective services budget. We are seeing police families living in appalling conditions in some parts of the state, in departmental housing that should be fixed. Despite months of complaints those dwellings have not been fixed. When we raise these issues in the parliament to put some pressure on the government to improve housing conditions for police families in remote parts of the state we are berated with the comment that we are working hand in glove with the Queensland Police Union. That is a good example of the arrogance of this government. When we raise issues on behalf of decent, hardworking families this government likes to arrogantly tread over the top and say that we are just working in with the Police Union.

There is still no promise with regard to seatbelts in school buses, something the National and Liberal Parties took to the state government before the last election. All we see is another review. This government just does not see that it could spend money on this project, yet it can spend \$24 million on the footbridge. That money probably could have seen the fitting of seatbelts to all school buses operating in dangerous or mountainous areas or to all school buses running on highways and travelling at greater than 60 kilometres an hour. The money wasted on the footbridge could have been used in that way.

Today we have questioned the Family Services Minister about the funding of \$103 million recommended by the Forde inquiry. I acknowledge that the government has put some additional funding into child protection, but it is not good enough. The Forde inquiry was held specifically to address the issue of the protection of children in this state. One hundred and three million dollars was declared to be the amount of money required urgently—immediately—to enable this state to provide the level of child protection provided in other states. It is now some four years after that inquiry and we are still some \$73 million short of the mark. We will continue to fight on behalf of children to see that funding is provided, that staff are recruited and that the department is managed by the minister such that staff do not have the current massive workloads and do not have to resort to ongoing industrial action for some 16 months in order to bring some attention to and some support for the task they undertake.

The caseloads for child protection officers are extremely high due to the absolute lack of frontline staff. We have seen the industrial turmoil arising from that over the past 16 months. More than 700 priority 1 child abuse cases went unassessed from July last year to March of this year. The number of priority 2 cases that went unassessed rose from 323 to 2,029. That is why we are pushing for the money. That is why we are pushing for the staff. That is why we are pushing for decent caseloads. Queensland staff are forced to handle up to 50 cases each. Equivalent staff in Victoria have a workload cap of some 15 cases. When we understand the difficulties of some of these cases we understand the need for staff to have a reasonable workload and a maximum number of cases.

The greatest reflection on a government is how it treats its children. It is truly a sad state of affairs at the moment. There is a lack of direction and a lack of management on the part of the minister. We are completely missing the target of \$103 million. We are still some \$73 million short.

The non-delivery does not just stop there. Members should look at some areas of regional and rural Queensland. There is no funding commitment in relation to the capping of bores. The federal government continues to provide its funding offer each year, but this government has not provided a funding commitment in the last budget for the capping of one of our greatest natural resources—the artesian bores. I mention the lack of weed control, particularly around national parks, and the mismanagement of national parks.

One of the great worries in this state is the drop in numbers of QR wagons available for the transporting of cattle. Farmers and agents are frequently forced to use road trains when they would normally be using the train system. This has been brought about because of the disrepair of the wagons on the southern line. They cannot be shifted up to the central Queensland and north Queensland lines as they have been in the past. I saw a case recently in central Queensland where the agents called for a train—they needed a large train to transport cattle—but could get only one wagon. They were forced to cast around and find trucks to put out onto the road to do the work the train system should have done and would have done in the past. Port authorities up and down the coast have also suffered at the hands of Mr Beattie's cash grab. Ninety-five per cent of their after-tax profits are to be stripped from the Queensland port authorities to help this Beattie government through its financial problems.

I refer to asset sales. The Brisbane Markets and Dalrymple Bay are being sold off to try to again help the cash-strapped Beattie government meet its commitments. The DPI has been forced to sell off assets from DPI research stations to fund the government's unbudgeted \$10 million contribution to the east coast trawl management plan. Talk about financial mismanagement—to provide for a \$10 million contribution, to not even have the money and to then sell off some of the assets of the Department of Primary Industries to meet it!

The cutback in general DPI staff across Queensland is having a huge impact on those Queensland export businesses that provide so much to our economy. More than 500 staff positions in the past three years have been lost. And the government talks about our unemployment problem!

But perhaps the biggest cash grab of all, with very little return for the people of Queensland, is the pub tax being imposed on the hoteliers to pay for the unfunded Lang Park complex. Of course, it will be the patrons who will feel it, because the publicans will have to meet their financial commitments on improvements and the redevelopment of the facilities that they provide for the public. So it will be the patrons who will feel it, no doubt through some form of increase in the price of beer or food. We just cannot whack on a tax like that overnight without it having some effect.

There has been complete disregard for the public in the whole process of the Lang Park redevelopment. The calling in of the Minister for State Development to take over the whole appeal process clearly demonstrated that. We are seeing this government moving to make secrecy an art form, particularly under freedom of information legislation, and continually abusing the cabinet exemption rules to cover up anything that it would be embarrassed about and which it does not want out there in the public arena.

This is a government obsessed with publicity. It is a government obsessed with its Community Engagement Division. It is spending thousands of dollars on the PR machine throughout the state when that money could have been spent in the Department of Families or perhaps on seatbelts for school buses.

We have seen projects lost, such as the PNG gas pipeline, the Brisbane light rail project, Expo 2002, the footbridge fiasco, the synchrotron to Victoria and the regional water projects. Most importantly, our record in unemployment is the worst in Australia. We should be above average. If we cannot get above average in Queensland, that is an indictment of this government that it is a poor performer; it has no direction; it has no target; it has no policy; and it has no real plan, other than ad hoc stopgap projects to address the issue of unemployment. On top of that, we have investors being turned away by this government's practice of ripping extra royalties out of the coalmining industry.

Time expired.
