



Speech by

JEFF SEENEY

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

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PRE-ELECTION BUDGET HONESTY BILL

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (8.56 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the bill before the House that was introduced by the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Southern Downs. It is a bill that is about accountability, it is a bill that is about transparency and it is a bill that is about honesty—all of these things that the state Labor government under Premier Beattie has turned into a mantra. This is the sort of rhetoric that we hear from the government all the time, but once again when the rhetoric is put to the test they fail, they fail and they fail again.

Tonight, we see another case of this failure. This bill has been introduced to test the rhetoric of the Beattie Labor government and they have failed that test yet again. The Treasurer came into the House tonight and, on behalf of the government, indicated that they were not prepared to support this bill. They were not prepared to support this bill because of the financial documents that the government already provides to this House. Obviously, they are the budget documents and the other document, which the Treasurer made great play of, was the half-yearly budget review, which he seemed to argue to the parliament fulfilled the need that this bill identified for budget honesty and for information in the run-up to an election.

It is worth noting again that this approach has been taken by other Labor governments in other states. By their actions, they certainly have not seen fit to support the arguments that the Treasurer put in the House tonight. Through the actions of the other states in introducing such legislation, they have put forward exactly the same arguments that were put by the Leader of the Opposition—the member for Southern Downs—the shadow Treasurer and other members on this side of the House. Those arguments were put forward by the colleagues of the Treasurer and the members of the government who have spoken to this bill. They are in direct contradiction of their colleagues in other states. The need for this sort of legislation has been recognised by those colleagues and it should be recognised by this parliament tonight.

There is no single thing that better identifies the need for this legislation than this government's record, and it is a record that is recorded in the financial documents of this parliament that is undeniable and a record which was quoted by the shadow Treasurer in the contribution that he made to the debate tonight. It is a record of financial dishonesty. It is a record of budget dishonesty which should cause every member on the government benches to hang their heads in shame. This is a government that has promised a surplus every year. Every year it has promised a surplus and every year it has delivered a deficit. It is worth, once again, revisiting those figures that the shadow Treasurer went through when he made his contribution to this debate.

In 2000-01 the budgeted surplus was \$28 million. The Treasurer came into the House and predicted a surplus of \$28 million. In fact, he delivered a deficit of \$858 million. How is that for budget honesty? What better example of budget dishonesty could there be than that sort of a performance from a Treasurer who comes in here tonight and says that we do not need this legislation because there are already documents in place to provide it? In 2001-02 the budgeted surplus was \$24 million. The Treasurer predicted a surplus of \$24 million. The actual deficit was \$894 million—even further away from the prediction! Once again, that is a great example of budget dishonesty. In 2002-03 the budgeted surplus was \$23 million. In actual fact, the deficit that was delivered was \$350 million. In 2003-04, the current financial year, we have seen a budgeted surplus of \$153 million. How many people really believe that this government is going to deliver a budgeted surplus of \$153 million? Based

on the record of the last three years, how could anyone be expected to believe that that is a real indication of the financial state of Queensland?

Yet those are the documents that we in the opposition have to use in preparing our alternatives for the people at an election campaign and those are the documents that the people of Queensland have to use in making their judgment, as they must, about who they are going to vote for and how they decide who will be the best financial managers of the state. These documents really have become a farce. Like everything else that the Beattie government does, it is more about grabbing a headline—it is more about achieving a media story—than actually representing the true facts of the situation. What this bill before the House tonight seeks to do is to make sure that the people of Queensland are properly informed before they make a judgment on election day. It seeks to ensure that the people of Queensland have the information upon which they can base a decision. Whatever the decision it is theirs to make, but it is an obligation of this parliament to make sure that they have the information. Whether they seek to use it or not, the people of Queensland should have the information upon which they can make a judgment about the actual financial management skills of the government and the actual financial performance of the state under the current government and the potential for the various proposals that are being put forward to be delivered by an incoming government.

There is no way that the people of Queensland can make that judgment reliably given the current situation. There is no way that it can be properly or legitimately argued that that information is available. It simply is not available under the current reporting mechanisms. That, as I said at the beginning of this contribution, has been recognised by governments in various jurisdictions. It has been recognised by governments right across the political spectrum in Australia that there needs to be that budget honesty so that people in a vibrant democracy can make the decisions that are so important for that democracy to work properly.

This bill seeks to give the people of Queensland that opportunity to make that decision in an informed way. It is particularly disappointing to see this effort be rejected so flippantly by this government in the House tonight. It is particularly disappointing to see that effort rejected so flippantly by a government that has a record of budget dishonesty second to none. This government's record of honest reporting to this parliament in terms of the financial positions of the state is illustrated in those figures. It cannot be denied. It is part of the record of the parliament, and it is a record that is building year after year after year. That record is building and it is a part of the public record that cannot be hidden, cannot be taken away and will always be there to illustrate the extent to which this government is fair dinkum about that rhetoric that we hear so often about accountability and honesty and transparency.

But there is no accountability, there is no honesty and there is no transparency unless there is a genuine willingness to make this information available to the people of Queensland—the people whom this government or any government that comes into this place is answerable to. There has to be a willingness for that government to make available to those people all of the information that they need to make that decision. That certainly is not happening at the moment. This bill seeks to rectify that. In that regard, this bill should be supported by every member of this parliament.