



Speech by

Mike Horan

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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VALUERS REGISTRATION AMENDMENT REGULATION (NO.1) 2004

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (8.02 p.m.): We have just heard from the honourable member for Kallangur, who does not want to see this parliament stand up to this Labor government when it starts to raise fees and charges by well in excess of the CPI. In this particular case we are seeing an average across-the-board increase of 105 per cent. There have been platitudes and promises from the Premier and the government about how they do not need any more fee increases other than CPI increases. We see all the letters that the Premier wrote, when he needed the balance of power, about not increasing anything over and above the CPI, and on and on it has gone over the past years from himself and the Treasurer.

Tonight we are debating a disallowance motion that the opposition has moved to try to stop fee increases across-the-board in this particular case of an average of 105 per cent. In some cases they are about 300 per cent. We will continue to stand up and move motions to disallow massive price increases that break the promises made by politicians of the Labor government. It is no wonder that people start to look down on politicians when they see Premiers and Treasurers of this state go out and make these statements and then they raise fees and charges by 105 per cent across-the-board. That is the job of an opposition—to stand up to excessive price hikes and to see that there is value for money for the taxpayers in this state and to see that the government of the day, when it goes out over and over again and says something, stands by what it says. It is about time that the members opposite started to have a bit of ticker. If they are part of a government that says it will not increase fees and charges and does not need to increase them by more than CPI, they need to ensure that it abides by that.

We have just heard a recent announcement by the Treasurer about the expected budget surplus for the past year, thanks very much to the GST, to the massive increase in prices, particularly throughout south-east Queensland, which has delivered a real motser and bonanza with regard to stamp duty, and the increase in returns from QIC on the investments that are held by the government on behalf of the public servants of this state.

Over the past few years we have seen massive wasting of money by this government. We have seen the millions that are spent on the Premier's Department. The Premier's Department has double the number of staff that the department of the Prime Minister of this nation has. We have seen massive spending on advertising and glossy brochures. We have seen departments like the department of families under the previous government where year after year there were increases in its budget because of the crisis that department was facing. Then it had to have a massive injection of funds last year. That money was partly needed, and I was one who argued for it for additional staff, but there was a serious problem of mismanagement. There were departments with ministers who were not up to scratch. There were dysfunctional departments that had the wrong culture and did not know how to manage and run the departments, so they kept throwing in millions and millions more. This is a department that cannot run itself properly and cannot properly look after the children that it was supposed to look after. The government throws more and more money at it when it is not being managed properly. We have a government that makes promises about not increasing fees and charges over the CPI, and here we are tonight debating a 105 per cent increase in charges.

Not long ago the government changed the arrangement with regard to valuations from a five-year valuation to an annual valuation. Under any normal business circumstances that would have required almost five times as many valuers, but that did not happen. In fact, due to the way that this government has treated its staff in DNR in recent years we have seen a 43 per cent decline in the number of valuers who work in the department. That brought about a serious crisis of staff numbers; it brought about a serious crisis of workload; and it brought about industrial action by those valuers who simply could not undertake the work that they were supposed to do. That system of annual valuations was not able to be undertaken.

Most of the councils of Queensland did not have the annual valuations done that they needed so that they could strike their particular rate system for the year. As a result, councils were left floundering. This government, even though it did not do a valuation for the councils of this state, still charged \$7.2 million for that service. It was the president of the Local Government Association, Paul Bell, who said words to the effect that it was one of the most remarkable things that anyone could ever see: that a government could actually charge \$7.2 million for a service that it did not provide. Because the government was facing a legal challenge by the Local Government Association of Queensland, the government rushed legislation into this House to protect itself from any action by the LGAQ.

That is the sort of mismanagement that we have seen in DNR, for example. Fancy bringing in a regulation or rule or a law that meant that the valuation system had to be changed from doing a valuation once every five years to an annual valuation system and not increasing the number of staff there when the staff probably should have been increased by up to five times.

We will keep coming into this House and moving motions for the disallowance of price rises when we see these exorbitant price rises that are not necessary—these exorbitant price rises that break the promises made by the Premier and Treasurer. Regardless of what members opposite say, it is the task of the opposition to expose to the people of Queensland what is actually happening in this state.

There has been mismanagement in department after department, and all of the good money that might have come in from stamp duty or from the GST that should be spent on infrastructure around the state—should be spent on roads, some decent systems of water reticulation, power services, recycled water and other things—is not being spent. All of those things that should be happening are not happening because the government is mismanaging its systems and mismanaging its departments. Then it comes out with increases like this of over 100 per cent that hit, in particular, the public servants.

The previous speaker in this debate talked about the rates charged by private valuers and made no mention of the particular salaries and workloads of the people working for DNR who are supposed to do—with limited numbers of staff reduced from what they had before—annual valuations for every shire and council throughout Queensland compared with the five-yearly valuation that used to happen. What does that do? Does that drive people to take short cuts? Instead of a valuer doing a very detailed and careful valuation the way they are trained, they have to get the work done with a lesser work force with about five times the amount of work than they had before. Obviously they will have a quick look at recent sales and the normal, intricate valuation that they are trained to undertake has to go by the board. Of course, they are then a far easier target for those people who wish to take matters to court and appeal their valuations.

In past times ministers for local government and natural resources have said that ratings and valuations are matters for the councils to decide. Many of the shires and councils of this state are rural and people do the job on a part-time basis. All that they want and expect from the government of the day is that it provides the valuations through the DNR—as it is supposed to do—that it has enough staff, that it looks after its staff, that it gives them a reasonable workload and that they do the work for which they charge a fee to the local government, and that is that fee of \$7.2 million that I mentioned before.

This parliament is a place where the government cannot just walk over the people of Queensland. This department is a place of debate and a place of review. For members opposite to suggest, with cheek and impunity, that the opposition stands against all of these increases time after time demonstrates the arrogance that has crept into this parliament with the massive majority of the Labor Party. The National Party will certainly stand up to every increase that it thinks is unfair, breaks promises or is unnecessary. Particularly if increases are 105 per cent to 300 per cent, we will certainly stand up and argue against them.

The litany of mistakes and mismanagement by the Labor government has to be seen to be believed. No doubt the minister will deride the opposition for standing against this. However, will the minister explain how many extra staff he put on to do the valuations when he chopped it from five-year to one-year valuations? How did he run his department? Why were the numbers of valuations cut by 43 per cent? The department is trying to do a job that is five times bigger than it was before with about half the staff.

Time expired.