



Speech by
Jeff Seeney

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Hansard Tuesday, 21 August 2007

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM; FUEL SUBSIDY

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.30 am): It was not hard to miss the extraordinary display of hypocrisy in the parliament this morning when, in his first ministerial statement, the Premier stood and tried to justify his government's decision making based on a push poll conducted with taxpayers' money that was designed to get the answers that the government wanted. Those of us who saw the questions listed in the media yesterday recognised only too quickly the classic push poll. The questions that were asked were to get the answers that the government wanted.

How extraordinary that at the same time that the government was using a push poll to justify its decision making it was doing its best, with an extraordinary level of effort, to stop councils holding real polls. It will prosecute councils for holding real polls at the same time as it is conducting push polls to justify its own decision making.

The Premier and the minister came in here this morning and crowed about the fact that they were able to use this push-polling technique to get 54 per cent support and 72 per cent support for their various questions. In the real polls that were conducted last weekend some shires voted 100 per cent against the government's proposed amalgamations. Three or four polls returned results of 98 per cent and 95 per cent against the government's proposed forced amalgamations for their shires. They are the polls that the government should be taking notice of. They are the polls that the government tried to stop by legislating to stop councils from consulting their communities in the most shameful piece of legislation ever to come before this House.

The Premier comes in here this morning and says that he recognises now that he stuffed up and he will not enforce that legislation—they were his words. That was not the only stuff-up in that legislation—to once again use the Premier's words—because the whole bill that was before this House was a stuff-up. The whole proposal to forcibly amalgamate Queensland's councils against their will can be similarly described. The whole proposal was political revenge; it was about making communities weaker, not about making councils stronger. It was not an economic reform, as the Premier has started to refer to it. It was political revenge pure and simple, it was political philosophy pure and simple and it was a stuff-up—to use the Premier's words—from start to finish.

We will continue to fight the proposal, just as communities across Queensland will continue to fight this grossly unpopular proposal. It is grossly unpopular because it is grossly unfair and grossly unjust. Queenslanders all over Queensland have realised that. Over the last couple of weeks I think that message has gotten through to the Beattie Labor government. It has not been able to sell its proposal to the people of Queensland despite millions of dollars of taxpayers' money spent in advertising. Despite the best efforts of the government's spin doctors, it has not been able to convince the people of Queensland that forced amalgamations of local councils is anything else but unfair and unjust.

This morning in parliament we saw a classic diversionary strategy. The government tried to divert attention away from this stuff-up—to use the Premier's words once again—and suggested that it is somehow going to move on. It dragged out the old chestnut of petrol prices and the 8.3c a litre fuel rebate scheme that the coalition government introduced when it was in power and that we have staunchly

defended against Labor attack ever since. There are members in this parliament who have probably not been here long enough to remember the last attack that the Beattie government launched on the fuel rebate scheme. It was back in the year 2000. It is instructive to look at the government's press releases from the time, when the proposal was to replace the 8.3c a litre fuel rebate scheme with a \$150 discount on registration.

The Beattie government put forward that proposal in 2000 and there was an enormous upswell of public opposition. That will be the case this time if, as I suspect, this inquiry is simply a stalking horse for something similar. The government was forced to back down seven years ago when the Premier said things such as it was the only way that he could ensure that the benefits got to the motorists. Henry Palaszczuk, the then minister for rural communities, made a great song and dance in his press release about giving regional people a \$180 reduction on their registration instead of the 8.3c per litre. The government was forced to back down in its previous attempt to do away with the 8.3c a litre fuel rebate which the coalition government introduced and has staunchly defended ever since.

This morning in the parliament we see another inquiry announced, another attempt to find a way to somehow do away with this 8.3c per litre that we guaranteed would be rebated to the people of Queensland because Queensland has never had a fuel tax. It is probably instructive for the newer members to understand how it came about in the first place that Queensland never had a state based fuel tax. There was a decision made that meant that the federal government was going to collect that fuel tax across all of the states. The coalition government in this House took a decision that the 8.3c a litre would be rebated to Queensland motorists and that we would not see a situation evolve where Queensland motorists were slugged with that sort of fuel tax. This decision was taken because of the impact that tax would have in rural and regional Queensland where distances are so huge and fuel usage at high levels is a necessity not an option.

That is the background to why that 8.3c a litre rebate was put in place. Ever since the Beattie Labor government has been in power it has sought ways to erode that rebate. It has looked for opportunities to attack that fuel rebate scheme and come up with excuses as to why it should not be there and how the money could be better used. The most blatant attack was the one that I referred to in the year 2000 when it tried to replace it with a \$150 discount on a registration fee. Of course, the registration fee would have very quickly gone back up. We exposed that at the time. I remember well the debates in this House where comparisons were made and calculations were done on how much assistance with the fuel bill that actually equated to. We were successful in ensuring that the government was not able to do away with the fuel rebate scheme and we will similarly ensure that we are successful this time. We will ensure that the inquiry that has been announced today is not used as a stalking horse to fulfil what is a long-time Labor Party dream to do away with the 8.3c a litre fuel rebate to Queensland motorists.

Mr Horan: Beattie wanted a petrol tax when he was a backbencher.

Mr SEENEY: The member for Southern Downs is right. The Premier is on record as advocating a petrol tax when he was a backbencher. There are many members who have supported the Labor ideology of having a petrol tax from the days when they were in opposition, and they have taken that ideology to government. It is only the fact that that 8.3c a litre rebate was in place and they have not been able to take it away that has saved Queenslanders from a petrol tax.

But it is important that I put on record our support for ensuring that the full benefits of that 8.3c a litre rebate are received by Queensland motorists. Let the Premier not play any silly political games with any suggestion that we are supporting an inappropriate rip-off by fuel companies or fuel wholesalers. Of course we support any moves to ensure that every cent of that fuel rebate gets back to Queensland motorists. Of course we do that. We have always done that. We have done that from the day that the fuel rebate scheme was first introduced. We will support any move to ensure that that money gets to Queensland motorists, because that was the intent of the coalition government that introduced it at the time. That has been the intent of every member who has sat on this side of the House since and who has staunchly defended the retention of that scheme.

Time expired.