



Speech by

Stirling Hinchliffe

MEMBER FOR STAFFORD

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PENALTIES AND SENTENCES AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HINCHLIFFE (Stafford—ALP) (4.10 pm): I rise to speak in support of the legislation before the House and to lament the sad display by Her Majesty's official opposition in this debate. The members opposite have repeatedly trotted out their scripted refrain that this legislation is a cynical grab for cash. I suggest that their efforts could be characterised as being a cynical grab for attention.

Unfortunately, they have chosen the wrong mark yet again. This legislation provides for, as we have all discussed, an increase in the value of the penalty unit from \$75 to \$100. As the first increase in the value of the penalty unit in nine years, this is an appropriate increase. From the outset of this debate, the members opposite harped on about a so-called massive increase of 33 and a third per cent. According to the Reserve Bank of Australia, the consumer price index increase over that same period is in the order of 36.7 per cent. Therefore, this increase is needed to maintain the appropriate penalty and punishment for offenders against the laws of the state. It is absolutely needed to keep pace with the value of goods and services in our community. Penalties need to keep pace with those community standards.

Mr Finn: So it is less than CPI?

Mr HINCHLIFFE: I take that interjection from the member for Yeerongpilly. It is less than the CPI. The members opposite have suggested that this measure is some sort of cash grab that affects all Queenslanders. Indeed, the member for Burnett's very words were that this very increase affects all Queenslanders. I will let the member for Burnett into what he might regard as a secret—or perhaps a conspiracy. Not all Queenslanders break the law. Indeed, the minority of Queenslanders who do infringe the law and who are fined, I would suggest, understand that they are only suffering the consequences of their own misdeeds. Even if in the world inhabited by the member for Burnett Queenslanders who offend regard the fine as some sort of tax, the penalty unit figure of \$100 remains the lowest in Australia.

I note the contribution by the member for Nicklin, who referred to the deterrent effect and particularly appreciated the difference between the penalty unit fine levels in New South Wales when compared to those in Queensland and the effect that has on drivers who might cross the Tweed River. Clearly, the member for Nicklin was not convinced by the arguments put by the member for Clayfield, which I would suggest were not particularly convincing for many of us in this House.

I referred earlier to the contribution by the member for Burnett. During his contribution that renowned wit—or half-renowned, as the member for Murrumba might have it—also attacked the honourable Attorney-General and suggested that in his second reading speech he had been hung on his own petard. If this legislation was truly a revenue-raising exercise, as the Liberal National Party would have the House believe, then the government would be introducing fines for the misuse of the English language. If there were fines for the misuse of the English language, the member for Burnett would have a permanent relationship with SPERS. A petard is an explosive device. I do not know how you get hung on an explosive device, but I do know that Shakespeare coined the phrase 'hoisted on one's own petard'. I hope the member for Burnett might now understand the proper meaning of that phrase. I would have thought he would have had the opportunity to learn it firsthand many times over.

The member for Toowoomba South was quite obsessed in his contribution with declaring that the resultant increase in fines from this legislation was across-the-board. He seemed mightily offended that the increase in fines will apply to offences other than traffic offences. I have a reminder for the member for Toowoomba South: offences other than traffic offences are offences. They need to be punished and held up as punishable. Harming animals, bespoiling the assets of our national parks, smoking in places prescribed under the very popular antismoking legislation brought in by Labor are all offences. All of those offences need to be punished and the punishment for them needs to keep pace with the value of money as much as the punishment for traffic infringements.

But despite the implications of the opposition's desperate concern for law-breakers, the underlying theme of the opposition to this legislation has nothing to do with crime and punishment. The underlying theme is the suggestion that the government has failed to manage the economy and is desperately raising fines to fill a budget hole. That would be laughable if it did not belie the Liberal National Party's paucity of economic credentials. While the member for Kawana breathlessly announced to the House that an increase from \$75 to \$100 was a 33 and a third per cent increase, he and his colleagues failed to do the maths and make the observation that over that nine-year period since the penalty unit was set the inflationary impact was, as I mentioned, in the order of 36.7 per cent. But let us not gild the lily by implying that even the Liberal National Party would be foolish enough to rely upon the opposition frontbench's Steven Bradbury, the member for Kawana, for economic credibility. I do not think even they would go that far.

Let us look at the issue that we should believe the opposition's claim that they are good economic managers, especially in comparison to Labor. This claim was exemplified and highlighted in the contribution by the member for Clayfield. It is now 49 days since the Treasurer tabled in this House a collection of the commitments that are being provided variously by members of the Liberal National Party to the people of Queensland—a \$65 billion unfunded policy platform. Forty-nine days later, there has been no admission from the members of the Liberal National Party that it is not their platform. They have not denied this platform as being their own.

These people want to be in charge of the \$36 billion Queensland budget. They want to manage the state's finances but, as we know, they cannot manage to pay for dinner without coming to blows. They want to be in charge of Queensland's \$200 billion economy, but they are just not up to it. The opposition seeks to put itself on the same—indeed even a higher—level as the government in terms of economic management.

Queensland's financial position—that is our financial assets compared to our liabilities—is the best of all the states and that is on the back of sound, strong financial management by this and previous Labor governments. For the past 12 years Queensland's economic growth has outstripped the nation's as a whole. Recently released ABS state accounts has placed Queensland ahead of all the states and territories and its 5.3 per cent annual growth was the highest of all the states. The Bligh government takes the responsible economic management of Queensland extremely seriously.

I think it is time the Liberal National Party heard some home truths about its economic management capacity. There is no question that the Liberal National Party's \$65 billion unfunded commitments would place extraordinary pressure on the state's finances and the sound economic position of the state. Queensland—the economic powerhouse of the nation with a growth rate currently at 4.25 per cent, which has been consistently higher than the national average for more than 13 years—would be under threat. The strong economic and jobs growth, which delivers a high standard of living for all Queenslanders, would be under threat. Our robust economy and significant investment in infrastructure—some \$2 million each and every hour this year—would be under threat. Strong business investment, forecast to grow at 9.25 per cent this year—even in these difficult economic circumstances—would be under threat. Low taxes—at the time of the last budget Queenslanders were on average \$407 per capita better off than taxpayers in other states and territories—would be under threat from the financial and economic mismanagers on the opposition benches.

Our low payroll tax system would be under threat. Businesses that benefit from low rates, low thresholds, reduced compliance costs and cuts to red tape would all be under threat from the supposed party of small business. The assistance to first home buyers that slashed up to \$9,500 from the cost of purchasing a first home by abolishing stamp duties on homes valued up to \$500,000 from 1 September this year would be under threat from their poor financial management and their profligacy in relation to their \$65 billion unfunded promises. Now is not the time to risk Queensland's economy with people who make it up as they go along, as the Liberal National Party does.

In this debate the bottom line is that those who do not want to pay increased fines should not commit offences. If you do not commit the offence there will be no increase. As the member for Murrumba puts it, why is the opposition so keen to stand up for law-breakers? In this debate the supposed party of law and order fails to be tough on crime—

Mr Choi: They're soft on crime.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: They are soft on crime; I hear the member for Capalaba. As the member for Murrumba said in his contribution to the debate, this is the party for law and order—well, sometimes. On that point, I commend the bill to the House.