



Speech by

Andrew Powell

MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE

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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL;
INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT (ASSET RESTRUCTURING AND
DISPOSAL) BILL; FUEL SUBSIDY REPEAL AND REVENUE AND
OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

Mr POWELL (Glass House—LNP) (8.30 pm): I rise to add to the debate on the cognate bills before the House. What we have here in these four bills is the dire and tragic consequence of Labor's dishonesty and Labor's incompetence. Only 91 days ago this government went to the polls. In the lead-up to election day on 21 March 2009, did the Bligh Labor government openly and honestly present its plans to implement a fuel tax? No, it did not. Did the Bligh Labor government openly and honestly present its plans to undertake a fire sale of Queensland Motorways? No, it did not. Did the Bligh Labor government openly and honestly present its plans to undertake a fire sale of the business arms of Queensland Rail? No. What about its plans to flog off the Port of Brisbane Corporation? No, it did not. And what about the Abbot Point Coal Terminal? No. Did the Bligh Labor government openly and honestly present its plans to sell off at the bottom of the market Forestry Plantations Queensland? No, it did not.

Was the Bligh Labor government up-front and honest with industry, with business, with the unions but, most importantly, was it up-front and honest with each and every Queenslanders who went to the polls on that day? The answer is a resounding no. I wish I could say that it stopped there. Unfortunately it does not. The dishonesty continues.

The residents of the Sunshine Coast are outraged. Even the Premier's own unsuccessful candidate for Kawana has come out in protest of one of the biggest election promise backflips of all time—a commitment to build the Sunshine Coast University Hospital. And the outrage is warranted. The health system is already stretched on the coast. As the mayor of the Sunshine Coast has said, if those opposite want the Sunshine Coast to do its bit in accommodating population growth in this state, then it needs to deliver the infrastructure needed to ensure that the population stays healthy and alive, and it needs to deliver it when it promises it.

Let me give the House a further taste of that outrage. I read from the *Sunshine Coast Daily* dated the 17th of this month, under the heading 'Sell the budget up here, Premier'—

The state government has treated the Coast with absolute contempt in the budget. At a time when the government is pushing to fast track development in the region, it has shown no such commitment to basic services including police, health and schools on the Coast ...

Not only is the Bligh government flogging off assets and borrowing money it can't afford, it is also pushing ahead with projects such as the Traveston Crossing Dam, which should never see the light of day on environmental and engineering grounds ...

Patients who travel every day to Brisbane for treatment—and will continue to do so—because of this government's incompetence will no doubt feel angry.

Like [the] former Labor candidate for Kawana ... they feel rightly betrayed by the Bligh government, which was still talking up the hospital in meetings last week.

Premier Anna Bligh should face the music and come to the Coast to sell her budget. After her non-show before the last election, she at least owes us that courtesy!

Over the past few days the member for Maroochydore has used strong language to express her outrage at this dishonesty. I second the member for Maroochydore's statements. Someone will die because this government has failed to deliver on its promises. But the dishonesty continues.

The LNP went to the last election with a commitment to find \$1 billion in efficiencies from the public sector. The LNP, as part of that commitment, guaranteed there would be no loss of jobs. It was those opposite who believed and then propagated the untruth that such efficiencies would result in 12,000 public sector front-line job losses. So let us dwell on that proposition for a moment. If we use the same logic as applied by those opposite then, as it states in the regional budget statement for the north coast, the 'increased public sector efficiency savings of \$280 million per annum' announced in this budget will result in 3,500 public sector front-line job losses in the coming financial year.

So when is the Minister for Health going to inform Queenslanders which hospitals will be losing front-line doctors and nurses? When is the Minister for Child Safety going to announce the child safety service centres that will be losing their child safety officers? When is the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services going to announce the regions that will be losing their police officers, their paramedics and their fire officers? It is logical, isn't it? If, according to those opposite, \$1 billion equated to 12,000 front-line job losses, then \$280 million surely equates to 3,500 jobs. So when is the Minister for Education going to come clean and list the schools that will be losing their teachers and teacher aides? And when is the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability going to tell her park rangers that their days are numbered? If the ministers cannot do so, then we once again see Labor's dishonesty in action. I can imagine how betrayed my former colleagues in the Public Service must feel.

As I said at the outset though, these bills are not only the tragic consequence of Labor's dishonesty but the tragic result of Labor's incompetence. Let us get something clear: those opposite would have us believe that the predicament we are in is solely as a consequence of the global financial crisis. That is wrong. No other mainland state or territory in Australia has lost its AAA credit rating. Why? Because no other state or territory in mainland Australia had built up such a disastrous amount of debt before the global financial crisis had ever been heard of.

This government through incompetence, ineptitude and mismanagement had raked up \$64 billion in debt before the global financial crisis. How did it do this? By stumbling from one crisis to another. We have had the health crisis, we have had the water crisis, we have had the child protection crisis and we have had the infrastructure crisis. Why has the state stumbled from one crisis to another? Because, despite glossy publications clearly outlining the anticipated population growth for Queensland, this government is incapable of implementing any plan or any project on time or on budget. As a result, in the middle of a boom time for Queensland's economy, the cupboards were bare. Money has been squandered on a \$9 billion water grid that includes the recycled water white elephant, a rusty and faulty desalination plant, a leaky pipeline and a ludicrous dam that is still awaiting federal approval.

Money has been squandered on reactive and poorly planned responses to the child protection crisis. Despite extensive academic and practice knowledge, despite submissions from PeakCare—the child protection non-government peak body—despite submissions from QCOS, from countless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers, from NAPCAN and from the federal government itself, all of which call for greater investment in prevention and early intervention, this government continues to talk up its paltry contributions to family support services. Compare the prevention and early intervention budget with the budget for placing children in care and one will understand why the child protection system continues to reel from crisis to crisis. Why can't the government get this investment right? Because it continues to throw dollar after dollar at poorly planned capital expenditure. In the department of child safety, let us look at one such example.

I note the government is investing another \$8.8 million in capital expenditure for the integrated client management system. The integrated client management system, or ICMS for short, was initially funded in the 2004-05 budget to the tune of \$22.1 million. At the time it was reported in the budget papers to—

... be an integral component for the long-term reforms in the new department—

which, by the way, has gone—

by providing improved and more accessible information on children in care. It will greatly enhance the maintenance of clear case plans for children, provide risk assessment and decision support tools to workers, provide better foster care records, improve the efficiency of foster care payments and improve management and oversight of service delivery. It is expected to have a positive impact on the quality and efficiency of service delivery.

Ask any manager in the department and they will tell you it is anything but that. Five years later, it can still not produce useful statistics in real time to improve management and oversight of service delivery. Ask any child safety officer and they will tell you it has not had a positive impact on the quality and efficiency of service delivery. It is a laborious administrative burden that limits their capacity to get on with their real work of keeping our children safe. And yet this government invested \$22.1 million in 2004-05,

\$25.3 million in 2005-06, \$8.9 million in 2006-07, \$6.7 million in 2007-08 and \$5.9 million in 2008-09. Add to that the \$8.8 million in capital expenditure allocated for the coming financial year and you have a staggering \$78 million on an ineffective information management system. And that does not even take into account the operational funding for the same system. This is incompetence and ineptitude in action.

It is this kind of poor planning, poor budgeting and poor project management that resulted in \$64 billion in debt before we had even heard of the global financial crisis. And it is this incompetence and its resulting staggering debt and interest payments that have led us to this: a fuel tax that will slug each and every Queenslanders every time they fill up at the bowser, that will slug each and every Queenslanders every time they fill up their trolley at the supermarket.

I want to pause at this moment and read out one of the many emails I have received from constituents on this matter. There are many I would like to share but, unfortunately, if I did I would be quickly pulled up or accused of using unparliamentary language. A resident from Flaxton writes—

Dear Mr. Powell, I am dismayed by the decision to scrap the fuel subsidy in Queensland. I see this as amounting to discrimination against those residents in country areas.

City dwellers with easy access to public transport may be able to offset some of the added costs but I and many like me do not have this choice. People in the city also get the benefit of competition between suppliers whereas those in the country have higher fuel prices anyway and usually have only one supplier unless they travel to their closest town which probably negates any saving anyway.

Costs for all goods will rise for those whose distance from the producer/supplier is greater, once again causing the brunt of the government saving to fall on those in country areas.

I am not of an age or physical condition to ride a bike and my nearest store (which does not supply all of the necessary groceries anyway) is several kilometres from my home, as are the voluntary activities in which I participate. I have already curtailed my travelling as petrol prices increased and foresee that I may have to give up some of my community work. As a self funded retiree I have suffered losses in the recent economic down turn. Is this to be the straw that breaks the camel's back?

I repeat: is this the straw that will break the camel's back? Has the government stopped to consider the true flow-on effect of this decision? How many such as this constituent will curtail their voluntary commitments—voluntary commitments that often keep small hinterland communities running? Who is going to replace these unstinting workers? Paid workers? Not likely. No, it is the services, the individuals they assist and the communities as a whole that will suffer because of this outrageous and dishonest decision.

The incompetence of this government has also led us to a fire sale of revenue-raising public assets at the worst possible time, with the market at rock bottom. This incompetence has resulted in this disastrous budget.

I would now like to turn to this disastrous budget and consider what the good people of Glass House have or have not gained from it. As I have already explained, they have not got funding for the Sunshine Coast University Hospital. The reordering deemed necessary by this government means that if—and I stress 'if'—a private partner can be found then we might just have an extra 110 public hospital beds come 2014. This is far fewer than the 650 promised during the election campaign three months ago.

Let me address a few more glaring and damning omissions. For starters, there is no funding for the D'Aguilar Highway. I think the member for Nanango will share my concern at that. Last year the RACQ undertook a detailed study of some 8,000 kilometres of rural highways, including 2,700 kilometres of state funded and controlled roads. In this report sections of road were awarded a star rating between one, being the least safe, and five, being the safest. These ratings were based on such factors as road alignment, the presence of unprotected roadside hazards, shoulder width and whether or not the road was divided. Among the lowest rated roads, with two stars, was the D'Aguilar Highway from Caboolture to Woodford and sections further along towards Yarraman.

The year before, the RACQ released the Australian Road Assessment Program report, which used crash statistics from the state and national highway networks to assess Queensland highways. The report showed that 28 per cent of road deaths in Queensland occurred on just four per cent of our road network. Guess which road featured highly in that four per cent? The D'Aguilar Highway, this time specifically from Caboolture to Kilcoy and Harlin to Kingaroy. Despite all of these reports and regular tragedies, the latest as recently as this week, no funding has been allocated to the D'Aguilar Highway. This is yet another appalling example of neglect, one that I suspect will haunt this government for years to come.

But wait, there's more. Where is the funding for the Beerburrum-Nambour rail duplication? My understanding is that the Beerburrum-Landsborough section is completely designed. It is ready to go. We have had the workers there ready to roll. The only thing missing was and is the funding. The rail corridor services a growing commuter population, a commuter population that would grow, reducing pressures on the Bruce Highway were the duplication to proceed—a duplication that would see an increase in the frequency of services and a reduction in travel time. Once again the Sunshine Coast has been overlooked. This decision not only hurts the communities on the Sunshine Coast; it hurts all communities in Queensland north of Caboolture, all the way to Cairns. This is because not only is this rail corridor key to passenger services; it remains the only route north for rail freight. Is it any wonder the Bruce Highway and

all other roads heading north deteriorate so quickly, requiring regular and expensive investment in maintenance and upgrades? With all of the freight being relegated to those roads it is no surprise.

If the government were smart it would be investing in projects that deliver multiple benefits. The Beerburrum-Nambour rail duplication would deliver benefits to Sunshine Coast commuters—not only those currently using public transport but also those who currently use the Bruce Highway, because those who are currently driving will think twice when they are paying an extra 9c per litre for fuel. The duplication would bring benefits to the transport companies that move freight north, and it would bring benefits including considerable savings to the department of main roads through reduced traffic and reduced wear and tear.

Whilst I note that there are commitments to complete the current roadworks on Maleny-Kenilworth Road, again I am appalled that there are no further contributions to improving the standard of this dangerous route. What will it take for this government to invest the less than \$10 million required to finalise the much needed widening of Maleny-Kenilworth Road? A death? A tragedy involving a school bus? I hope not.

To the people of Glass House I say: know that I am committed to ensuring each of the projects is elevated in priority by the government. I will work tirelessly to see appropriate investment in the Sunshine Coast University Hospital, in the D'Aguiar Highway, in the Beerburrum-Nambour rail duplication and in Maleny-Kenilworth Road.

As I approach the end of my allotted time, let me try to be positive for a moment. I would like to acknowledge the \$2.2 million allocated to Palmwoods State School to construct a new administration block and convert the existing administrative area into a new learning area for kids. In doing so I acknowledge the member for Nicklin, who worked with Palmwoods State School until the election, when the redistribution brought it into Glass House. It is the foresight and lobbying of the member for Nicklin which has achieved this fantastic and long overdue outcome.

I also acknowledge the funding for an expansion of the Caboolture Hospital emergency department and support provided for one-on-one midwifery services and postnatal support. However, I would love to see more of it. I know the parents of Woodford are rejoicing that the government has included them in the first round of funding for new kindergartens.

Unfortunately, that is where the good news ends, because what is the largest capital expenditure project slated for Glass House? It is the \$212 million northern pipeline interconnector. This government cannot find funding for the Sunshine Coast Hospital but it continued to waste good money after bad through a pipeline no-one on the coast wants at a staggering cost of \$10 million per kilometre of pipeline. Finally, the government continues to invest in the doomed Traveston Crossing Dam, this year to the tune of \$75 million—incredible.

In conclusion, Queensland has been condemned to a decade of debt because of the Bligh Labor government's dishonesty and financial incompetence. Every Queenslanders will pay for Labor's financial incompetence, every day in every possible way for years to come.