



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

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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 KNUTH (Dalrymple—LNP) (3.01 pm): In speaking to the appropriation bills, the Infrastructure Investment (Asset Restructuring and Disposal) Bill and the Fuel Subsidy Repeal and Revenue and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, I would like to express my disappointment in the 'bankcard budget' that has been handed down. It is a disgrace that the funding for Queensland is to be paid by credit, resulting in a massive \$85 billion debt and a massive \$14 million interest payment each and every day. Another disappointment is the sale of the state's assets—its ports and other infrastructure—to fund this mismanagement. The loss of the fuel subsidy only adds to the woes of everyday Queenslanders.

Mr Fraser: Did you buy your first house with cash?

Mr KNUTH: You have to agree with that: it will only add to the woes of every Queensland.

Mr Fraser: Did you buy your first house with cash?

Mr KNUTH: I will be opposing this and I am happy to let you know that. All of these measures add up to an increasingly desperate government which spends like there is no tomorrow, and now the government has the gall to blame the current financial crisis for the mess it finds itself in.

Mr O'Brien: You've got two mortgages.

Mr KNUTH: Queensland has lost its credit rating—once the boasting point of the government—and now faces the loss of assets which have taken years to establish and cost taxpayers dearly in the past.

Mr O'Brien: Two mortgages joint with spouse and a business loan. He's got three loans.

Mr KNUTH: You will be selling off Queensland Rail? You will be voting for it tonight?

In relation to the fuel subsidy, people from New South Wales may travel interstate to access cheaper fuel, but the money they spend when they come remains in the state anyway. The introduction of this tax disadvantages not only the southerners crossing the border for subsidised fuel but also every Queensland, including rural and regional Queenslanders who have to travel to access services that are no longer available in their communities because this government persists in removing them.

Queensland is the most decentralised state in Australia, with poor public transport available to most. The introduction of the tax will have burdensome financial consequences for the average family budget. Queenslanders rely heavily on private transport in every facet of daily life, from dropping off their children at school to doing the weekly shopping to attending weekend sporting activities. The introduction of a fuel tax will impose significant costs for the transport of goods, resulting in higher prices for everyday groceries. Many struggling sporting associations will see a massive drop in registrations with the added burden of higher fuel costs. Every industry will suffer, from the flagging tourism industry to the already overburdened primary industry.

The fuel subsidy was introduced in 1997 by the Nationals' Rob Borbidge. It has ensured that Queenslanders and visitors to the state have paid significantly less for fuel than other states. This initiative has provided businesses with incentives for investing in and expansion into Queensland. It has given incentives for tourists and southerners to visit this state and given Queensland families opportunities that they would otherwise not have had.

All Queenslanders will have to bear these costs. I cannot believe that this government has the audacity to blame the global financial crisis. When the Goss government took over in 1989, Wayne Goss admitted that he could not believe what he inherited. He saw a state that had infrastructure, roads, power stations and dams being built. But when Wayne Goss got into power the first thing he did was introduce the 'no new dams' policy. Then Beattie introduced the 'no new dams' policy. But what happened? South-East Queensland ran out of water. So what did Premier Beattie do? He put his hand on his heart and said, 'I will provide water for South-East Queensland residents.' So what did he do? He goes over to Traveston—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms van Litsenburg): Order! Will the member speak through the chair.

Mr KNUTH: So he goes and has a look at Traveston Crossing. SunWater would not entertain it. Goss would not entertain it. Borbidge would not entertain it. But Beattie said, 'I will build my dam there because I want to provide water to South-East Queensland residents.' He has spent \$500 million, and what has that resulted in? Nothing. We have an \$11 billion water grid. How much water has that produced? Absolutely none. We have an \$85 billion deficit, and \$9 billion of that is to help fund the health crisis. Then we had the energy crisis because the government did not upgrade the high-voltage network. And Labor wonders why it has got this state into deficit.

Over the years this government did not invest in infrastructure. All this government has done over the years is spend bucketloads of cash promoting what a good job it is doing without doing anything.

Ms Croft: What about the roads in Charters Towers?

Mr Shine: Don't you want the money spent up there?

Mr KNUTH: Well, I will—

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Will the member speak through the chair.

Mr KNUTH: I am happy that in this budget we did get some crumbs. It was great to see that we did get some crumbs. We have been fighting for those crumbs.

Ms Croft: What sort of crumbs?

Mr KNUTH: This is something that may seem little to you, but the funding for midwifery in Charters Towers and the Tablelands is very pleasing. We have seen all of our maternity services closed down year in, year out. Mums have been forced to travel 700- and 800-kilometre round trips to give birth to their babies. That is one thing that I would like to say. We have also been crying out for the extra funding for the Gregory Development Road every year, year in and year out. We got \$16 million, even though the area produces \$35 million in royalties for the state government. But we are appreciative of the \$16 million. Another boost in the northern part of the electorate was \$5.5 million—

Mr Shine: More!

Ms Croft: Big crumb!

Mr KNUTH: Here we go. But it was Australian government funding; it was not state government funding. It was funding to establish a trade training centre at Atherton State High School. We can thank the taxpayers of Australia for that. It had nothing to do with the state government. There is also funding towards the replacement of the ambulance station at Ravenshoe. That has been going on for 10 years, so that funding is much appreciated. There is funding for the construction of the SES facility and the ambulance station in Moranbah. That has been going on for about 10 years, but we have finally got that funding so that is great. It is much appreciated.

Once again, we see the health and wellbeing of rural and regional residents ignored. There was no increase to the patient travel subsidy. Each patient will have to pay an extra 10c a litre for fuel. The travel subsidy of 15c a litre is a pittance. It has only increased 5c a litre, from 10c to 15c, in the last 15 years.

Mr Messenger: They'll agree to increase the patient travel subsidy now, won't they?

Mr KNUTH: That's right. Will you agree? I hope you will agree to increase the patient travel subsidy, seeing that the price of fuel will go up an extra 10c a litre.

I am disappointed that there was no funding for the Herberton to Irvinebank road. Serious accidents and dreadful injuries have occurred along this road, including the rollover of a minibus on Sunday, 24 May, in which children were injured. The road is a death trap. Virtually every time people use the road they risk life and limb. The road is used by locals and tourists alike, yet it is largely avoided by the tourists because of its dangerous condition. Rental cars using the road are unable to be insured.

The state government contracts the council to maintain the road. We should forget about paying hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to grade that road because after it rains the gravel just washes off. It is a catastrophe. The state government would be better off spending money sealing the road from

Herberton to Irvinebank once and for all. That way money would not be wasted year in, year out grading the road. Once this road was sealed, the council could concentrate on the road from Irvinebank to Petford, which is also in desperate need of sealing.

The Herberton and Irvinebank areas are missing out on the tourist dollar that would otherwise be available if the road was sealed and made safe. Both Herberton and Irvinebank are towns of immense historical importance and are consequently attractive to domestic and overseas tourists and history buffs alike. Herberton is one of the oldest towns on the Tablelands and at one stage was the richest tin mining field in Australia. Herberton now offers numerous historical sites and places of interest, including Queensland's only tropical vineyard. When Vulcan lode was discovered in 1889, Irvinebank grew to be Australia's deepest and richest tin mine and is credited by historians with defining Australia's future in many ways. Irvinebank is also famous for being the only known locality of two rare and significant plant species: an orange-red flowering grevillea and the world's only purple-flowering wattle.

Another issue screaming for immediate attention is the construction of overtaking lanes between Charters Towers and Townsville. Concerned road users are intimidated by the number and size of the heavy vehicles on the road. Many Charters Towers road users are older residents on their way to medical appointments in Townsville or tourists who are not used to the size and length of road trains thundering along the highway. There is one westbound overtaking lane on this section of the road and no eastbound overtaking lane. In contrast, there are seven overtaking lanes between Townsville and Home Hill—four northbound lanes and three southbound lanes. This disparity is very difficult to comprehend, considering an estimated 60 road trains use the road every day servicing the mining, cattle and petroleum industries, with more road trains expected to use the road in the near future.

As well as grey nomads with their vans, other tourists and residents from every town between Townsville and Mount Isa are on the road daily. There have been numerous accidents along this part of the Flinders Highway and unfortunately many fatalities. While different factors contribute to serious accidents, one undeniable factor is the lack of overtaking lanes. Today's traffic is fast and heavy, but knowing an overtaking lane is not too far away provides a sense of relief and security to road users who may be stuck behind a line of vans or road trains.

I wish to bring to the attention of the House a potentially deadly traffic situation at the T-intersection of Wakefield Road and the Millaa Millaa-Malanda Road. The problem is that there is no turning lane for traffic turning off the main road into Wakefield Road. The intersection sits at the bottom of a gully and the road is too narrow for all but one car to squeeze past a turning vehicle, so all traffic behind a vehicle that has indicated its intention to turn must slow down and/or stop, otherwise they end up down an embankment into a tree or head-on into oncoming traffic.

Traffic on the highway is travelling at top speed, and stopping for a vehicle which is in the middle of the road and is intending to turn into Wakefield Road down the bottom of the hill is downright dangerous. To remind members, Wakefield Road is a one-lane road and many times cars wanting to turn into the road cannot, as vehicles coming out from Wakefield Road onto the main highway are in the way. This forces vehicles to stop in the middle of the highway, with trucks pounding down behind them and slamming on their brakes. Road users have been smashed from behind by loaded trucks, with many near-death experiences having occurred, because the trucks had limited space and time to see the turning vehicle, slow down and take evasive action. Trucks regularly zoom down one side of the hill so they will have enough speed to climb the next hill without changing gears, but the intersection sits at the gully at the bottom of the first hill. Vehicles attempting to turn into Wakefield Road will be in this gully. A turning lane is urgently needed.

I would also like to bring to the attention of the House the disappointing news about the sale of Queensland Rail. The Bligh government will sell off the coal component of Queensland Rail and the Abbot Point Coal Terminal and also target Queensland Rail's bulk retail and regional freight, which includes the Townsville to Mount Isa line. This sell-off is probably one of the greatest acts of betrayal by the Labor Party in Queensland's history.

I had the privilege of working for Queensland Rail for 20 years. When I first joined, a job in the railway was a job for life. We had a rail network that had a station in every town, a trucking yard every 30 kilometres and a freight service that reduced the traffic on our roads. Our small communities thrived on the back of the railways and could depend on a reliable freight service. Queensland Rail boasted up to 26,000 employees, and many of those workers were Aboriginals, South Sea Islanders and Torres Strait Islanders. This was Queensland Rail before 19 years of Labor government under Goss, Beattie and now the public asset seller, Premier Anna Bligh. We never thought we would see the day when a 144-year-old icon, built by the taxpayers of Queensland through their sweat and toil, would be sold.

I have spoken with rail employees who fear for their jobs. They are dismayed and have said that they cannot believe the Labor Party has betrayed their core principles and grassroots. Our Citytrain passenger service runs at a loss of a billion dollars each year—

Mr Shine: Will you stop the sale?

Mr KNUTH: We will be voting against it and we will be very proud to vote against it. We cannot believe that you are actually doing this. You are selling Queensland Rail. This is a public asset and I encourage the backbenchers to cross the floor and not support the sale of this public asset.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms van Litsenburg): Order! Will the member for Dalrymple please speak through the chair.

Mr KNUTH: Our Citytrain and passenger service runs at a loss of \$1 billion each year and relies on the coal network to prop it up. Who is going to pay for it when these profitable networks are gone? These fire sales have nothing to do with the economic crisis. The \$75 million debt was racked up by Labor during the good years of the mining and housing boom and strong economic growth. The Bligh government promised 100,000 jobs during the election campaign, but all we have got is job losses and asset sales and the state has lost its credit rating. The sale of Queensland's assets will mean the state will have no income stream for our future generations—no income for our hospitals, our roads and our schools. This shows gross government mismanagement of a magnitude not seen before. I encourage government backbenchers to not support this sell-off and stick to their core principles.

I also want to mention a very important issue that was supported by the previous Minister for Main Roads and Local Government when he was the Minister for Communities and Minister for Disability Services Queensland, Warren Pitt. We did not receive any funding. In Charters Towers, we have been crying out for a specific dementia unit for the last decade. The previous minister had been through the facilities. Unfortunately, the Pandanus unit there had its beds removed in 2001 and it was closed down, so the unit is sitting vacant. This is probably one of the most emotional, compassionate issues in Charters Towers.

The elderly patients there are being forced into other care facilities which are hundreds of kilometres away, if not 500 to 600 kilometres away. Some of the families of these elderly patients—their husbands or their wives—are in their 70s or 80s and they cannot drive the seven or eight hours to see them. We have a wonderful facility that was built in 1929 which houses around 120 patients at this present moment. It provides that wonderful service for the elderly patients, but as they develop dementia they are forced to move on to other care facilities.

All that is needed as a start-up cost is \$1.5 million. That is all we are asking for. I have invited the Minister for Health to come to Charters Towers to speak to the aged-care action group. This was something that we committed to in the last election. There are three cases right now where the patients have been forced to move to other care facilities. Some of these people have lived in this area their entire lives and they have contributed greatly in the area. They have owned businesses, they have worked on the railways, they have worked on cattle stations. A lot of them have worked in the Eventide facility but their families have had to send them away.

We tabled a petition with over 2,000 signatures, and I encourage the minister to come to Charters Towers to speak to the Charters Towers residents and see what a compassionate and emotional issue this is. I wanted to bring that to the attention of the House. When it comes to selling these assets, especially Queensland Rail, I vehemently oppose that.