




Speech by
Bill Byrne

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard Tuesday, 5 June 2012

**TREASURY (COST OF LIVING) AND OTHER LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr BYRNE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (10.01 pm): I rise to speak to the Treasury (Cost of Living) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. We are coming off a full moon, so I think you should put your hearing protection in for what is going to happen in a few minutes. We have been exposed to some fairly passionate points of view from some members, and I dare say that some may even be based on facts. However, this bill is all about form and exceedingly light on substance. The essence is ideological whilst the effects are at the margins, if noticeable at all, to the vast majority of Queenslanders. Frankly, it is more froth and bubble from a government fixated with spin. Let us get down to some basics on this issue. This bill could certainly have been sent to a committee and still meet the requirements of the 1 July implementation. What is urgent about this bill is the need to provide the impression of action from this LNP government.

Let us talk about payroll tax. The ALP supports tax exemption threshold increases, but members should not forget that Queensland already has amongst the lowest basic flat rate of Australian states and territories—the tax scale and the business scale being more advantageous from a business perspective than those of the masthead conservative states like New South Wales and Victoria. The present arrangements in this state do not constitute a major obstruction or disincentive to business relative to our direct competitors. I have to say that this less than earth-shattering rollout schedule over six years is hardly likely to create a dramatic impact on the lives of the vast majority of Queenslanders.

The bill also seeks to amend the Electricity Act in order to freeze the current residential electricity tariff, tariff 11. The Labor Party supports the efforts to reduce cost-of-living pressures on Queenslanders, but are we discussing a significant reduction in tariff? No, we are not. The government's response to cost-of-living pressures on Queensland families is to keep exactly the same pressure in place for 2012-13, and what happens then? Will the magic fairy of further electricity industry deregulation or rationalisation of the industry materialise with reductions in price across this state? No, they will not. This facet of the bill is all about short-term expediency with no strategic effect whatsoever.

The second aspect of this bill relating to electricity is the intention to have the first statements issued to consumers include information on the impact of the Commonwealth carbon tax. This has nothing to do with good public policy; it is all about Tony Abbott's election campaign and this government acting as good foot soldiers in that campaign. Will these statements also include information on the Commonwealth government's household assistance package designed to alleviate cost increases that may result from the introduction of the carbon tax? No, they will not. The fact is that the LNP is totally opposed to the carbon tax, as we have heard in this chamber this evening. That is fair enough. Tony Abbott is on the record as saying that 'climate change is crap' and that he does not think that the science is settled. Our own environment minister says that he is not convinced that humans are contributing to global warming. I hate to inform this House that climate change is real, is accelerating and is largely caused by humans, and carbon dioxide is a significant component of the problem.

Government members interjected.

Mr BYRNE: And a room full of Luddites. Unfortunately, this government would rather allow the opinions of Nick Minchin, a renowned climate change sceptic who has been at the forefront of the conservative free market rhetoric that created and promoted Work Choices, to be the essential substance of conservative labour market deregulation and improved productivity. Unfortunately, Nick Minchin does also not believe that cigarettes are addictive or that passive smoking is harmful and—guess what—big tobacco is overregulated! There is one common thread in the agenda: support the big end of town, including the big polluters, at all costs. The only thing that matters is profit for big enterprises and damn everything else! After all, a free and unrestrained market is the optimal position, isn't it? Of course, the last thing Queenslanders want is a government oversighting the activities of the private sector because that would be an artificial inhibitor distorting the free market. I do not believe that every member of this government actually believes that rot, but unfortunately some do. This constant theme of overregulation comes from the same sources. It really does not matter what the private sector does, as Nick Minchin's ridiculous position on big tobacco revealed.

This leads me to the element of this bill that seeks to amend the Queensland Competition Authority Act in order to create the Office of Best Practice Regulation. This looks like some sort of flashback to Ronald Reagan and the disastrous views that he held about the role of the state in economics. It is again about ideology. Is the passage of this element of the bill going to directly benefit a pensioner living in Wandal in Rockhampton? Of course not, and an Office of Best Practice Regulation will mean nothing to them as they attempt to meet their monthly bills.

The opposition is certainly not opposed to sensible and balanced review of existing legislation and, where necessary, removal. This should be approached in a transparent and methodical manner from portfolio domains via committees and not from what appears to be more bureaucracy supported by an ideological Star Chamber empowered to investigate competition, industry, productivity and best practice regulation—whatever that means to this government—at the direction of ministers. Really, does this parliament seek to be remembered as the group that threw out the Glass-Steagall equivalent with the bathwater?

Government members: What?

Mr BYRNE: Read a book, mate. This government will ultimately be held to account for the profligate promises made regarding the day-to-day cost-of-living promises confronted by working Queenslanders. The family fortnight budget of 30 June 2013 will be no less than the same budget today because of the passage of this bill. This bill is a very, very modest step indeed.