




Speech by

Hon. Jarrod Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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TREASURY (COST OF LIVING) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. JP BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (4.20 pm): It is my pleasure to speak this afternoon to the Treasury (Cost of Living) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. The reason that it gives me an immense amount of pleasure to speak to this bill is that it is providing real cost relief for Queensland families, something which the average Queenslander has not had for many, many years. It is great that as a new government we can come into this place and talk about taxation relief because I would hazard a guess that the last time a bill was debated on taxation relief was probably between 1996 to 1998 when the last conservative government was in power in Queensland. All we have debated in the last 14 years in particular have been higher taxes, higher charges, higher rates and higher registrations. Those opposite stopped using the word 'tax' and replaced it with 'levy' so we then debated bills in this place about levies. So it is great that we can actually talk about taxation relief. I would say that the members of the Australian Labor Party would not know what it meant because they have never debated an actual bill that gave relief to Queenslanders in the 14 years they have served in this place.

What an opportune time to afford the average Queenslander this cost-of-living relief that is burdening them. There has been one thing on the shoulders and the minds of Queenslanders for the last 14 or so years and that has been the Labor Party. The Labor Party has got in the way of business and the individual in Queensland. It has not let businesses thrive, nor sought investment opportunities. It has not created an environment to attract businesses to Queensland. Queensland used to be a place of opportunity, a place where business would want to invest. We used to stand up and say people from down south were moving here in their droves to be a part of Queensland and our economy. Those days have gone. But it is not over. Although the Treasurer and the government members will talk about the Commission of Audit in great length, particularly this week, it is important for business to understand that all is not lost, that they now have a government that is on their side. They have a government that is on the side of the working class people in Queensland. They have a government that will drive down cost-of-living pressures. At the 2012 election Queenslanders wanted that change and voted for it. It is great to see that a government with a new Premier in only its first 100 days can be in this place debating bills in relation to taxation relief in Queensland, a sight the Labor Party would not know if it fell in front of them or hit them in the head. All those opposite could do was—

Mr Johnson: Create the taxes!

Mr BLEIJIE: I will take the interjection from the member for Gregory. The reason they had to create taxes is that they created unsustainable debt. The only way they could pay the debt was to increase taxes. They could not manage the economy. They could not create an opportunity for investment in Queensland where businesses and foreign investors would want to come. Queensland used to be the land of opportunity. This bill, aptly named the Treasury (Cost of Living) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill, amends the Duties Act. I was once a lawyer.

Mr Johnson: You are still a lawyer!

Mr BLEIJIE: I am the first law officer. I guess I am still in the field.

Government members interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: I have heard before all the jokes about lawyers. I am not practising any more, but there was a time when I did. I note that there are many lawyers in the chamber now with the new field of MPs. There was a time when I practised in this area. Prior to the global financial crisis I saw property transactions involving people who could ill-afford a loan but wanted to live the Australian dream of owning their own home and they wanted to own a home in Queensland. One of the only things that gave them the capacity to own their own home and live the Australian dream, which we on this side of the House want people to aspire to—we want people to be successful in their ventures and their personal lives—was the stamp duty concession. Just as things were looking bright in terms of the economy, investment and resources the Labor Party smacked them down right where it hurt and got rid of the concessional rate of stamp duty. That was the only thing that was getting a lot of people across the line in terms of living their dream of owning their own home in Queensland. I remember the Treasurer at the time, Andrew Fraser, the former member for Mount Coot-tha—incidentally, don't we have a good member for Mount Coot-tha now!—said that it brings us in line with other states. Why would the former government aspire to be one of the highest taxing states in Australia? Wouldn't we want Queensland to be one of the lowest taxing states where people would want to move to and invest in? That is the state we should aspire to be. But no, they wanted to be like every other state. They were looking at the New South Wales economy under the Labor Party at the time. I can see them sitting in the back room there looking at the basket-case that was the New South Wales economy and saying, 'Let us aspire to be just like New South Wales'. That is where they were heading. That is where Queensland would have headed had we not had a change of government in the March 2012 election. We would have headed to the basket-case economy as was the case when the New South Wales Labor Party had that reign for so long.

It is great that Queenslanders who are investing in Queensland and moving into a principal place of residence are afforded the opportunity to claim a concessional rate of stamp duty on their property. We are not talking about the first home owner grant here, we are talking about the transfer duty. There are different ranges of the transfer duty. If it is an investment property you do not get the concession. If it is a principal place of residence, under the old system you received a concession as long as you moved into it within 12 months. The Labor Party got rid of it so every Queenslander would be paying the same tax as an investor coming into Queensland would pay. It gave no incentive for people who wanted to upgrade because they were taxed to do that. If a person wanted to seek a job somewhere else and they wanted to buy another property in Queensland the former Labor government taxed them for that. This bill will reintroduce that concessional rate of stamp duty.

We think, as does industry, that it will provide an invigoration in terms of investment opportunities in Queensland. It should never been taken off, but as the member for Gregory said before, all the Labor Party knew was the word 'tax'. They did know a second word, member for Gregory, and that was 'increase'. For the last 14 years that is all we ever heard from the Labor Party. If they could not tax it they called it a levy. If they could not call it a levy they increased the tax on something else. That is all they ever did.

I turn to payroll tax. For years, business has been crying out about payroll tax. The state needs taxes. We are not denying that fact. If we are to provide police, teachers, nurses, judges, lawyers and so on, we need taxes. We are not denying that. We have to recognise the fact that, if you keep on increasing taxes, you can get to a point where the economy will come crashing down because people can no longer afford to pay them. It does not matter how much the state taxes a person, if they cannot afford it the state will not get the tax. We say to Queensland business, particularly small to medium-sized enterprises, that the government will offer incentives in terms of payroll tax relief, that is, we will increase the threshold from \$1 million to \$1.1 million in the first year, going up to \$1.6 million after the sixth year. Of course, that relief falls within our theme of reducing unemployment by four per cent in six years. That is a realistic target. We did not rush into the election and say, 'Folks, vote for us and in three years the unemployment rate will be down.' It is a very conservative and realistic estimate that we will be able to achieve in six years. It is not a short-term bandaid solution.

The payroll tax reforms will give 5,000 businesses immediate relief. Members opposite have failed and always will fail to understand that the more business has in its pocket, the more people it can employ. Consequently, the unemployment rate will reduce. Not only will the unemployment rate reduce but also people will be working and will be able to afford to feed their families. That is what it all means. Until members opposite get into the sphere of working out that small business runs the Queensland economy and keeps people employed, they will never hit the mark with the answers.

Mr Newman interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: I take the Premier's interjection. They do not understand; they never have and they never will. Over many years in Queensland we have seen Socialist and Bolshevik governments and those opposite are no different. They just spend, spend, spend and tax, tax, tax. Of course, in 2005-06 we had the situation in Queensland where expenditure was here and revenue was higher than the expenditure. But come 2011, under the Treasurership of Andrew Fraser and prior to that Anna Bligh, state expenditure was way up here and revenue was here. This morning, the Premier said that, from reading the

Commission of Audit document, it does not take a rocket scientist to understand that we have a problem. We have a problem when expenditure is here and revenue is here. Who fills the void? How is the void filled? According to the Australian Labor Party, it is filled by the taxpayer, but the taxpayer cannot afford to fill that void anymore.

We want business to invest in Queensland so that small business can once again run and thrive within the huge cog of wheels that is the state economy. Small business is the engine of the economy. It is the oil that keeps the cogs working. We want to free up business. We want to invest in the oil, so that the cogs can turn once again. When business is paying less tax, it is employing more people. The Labor Party will then say, 'But your revenue will be lost.' It does not understand that that is a short-term view of the world. It does not understand that, by having more people employed, we are working towards getting our AAA credit rating back. If we have low unemployment in Queensland, people will want to come here. We want government ministers to have knocking on their doors people from right around Australia saying, 'We're from Western Australia and we're from South Australia, and we are here to invest in Queensland.' We are telling businesses right across Australia that we would enjoy the opportunity to talk to them. We want to talk to businesses from other states and territories so that they invest in Queensland and increase employment rates for Queenslanders.

This bill contains relief for business under the Duties Act, it contains payroll tax relief and it contains relief from increasing electricity charges. From my office I listened to the speech of the member for Woodridge. She said, 'How dare Liberal National Party members of the former parliament tell people that they should bring their electricity bills to the ballot box.' Many of us in the former parliament also said, 'Bring your water bills to the ballot box.' We asked Queenslanders to bring their electricity and water bills to the ballot box to remind them, day in and day out, of the grief and burden that the Queensland Labor Party caused to the Queenslanders who could least afford to pay for increasing cost-of-living pressures. I remember when Peter Beattie stood in this place and said, 'We're doing all this stuff in the electricity industry, but don't fear, there's no threat and no-one will be worse off.' However, across Queensland we have seen a \$700 increase in people's electricity accounts. We are pleased that this bill will freeze the regulated standard retail electricity tariff 11 at 2011-12 prices.

I turn to the evil great big new tax, the carbon tax. We opposed it when it was announced. The federal coalition has opposed it.

Mr Newman: We oppose it now.

Mr BLEIJIE: I take that interjection. What we see at a federal level is exactly what we have seen at a state level for the past 10 or so years. The only way for federal Labor to get out of the problems created by its financial mismanagement and its incompetence is to tax, tax, tax. We should be living in a world where we look at taxation relief. The Labor Party talks about 'tax' and 'increase'. Those are the two words in its vocabulary. We talk about 'taxation' and 'relief'. We understand that taxation is important, but we also understand that in particular situations we have to offer relief to get the cogs in the economy moving. Therefore, it is great that Queenslanders will see the dreaded evil great big new tax, the carbon tax, mentioned on their electricity bills.

I live in a world of optimism. I hope that those seven little mice opposite will talk to their federal colleagues and keep campaigning against the carbon tax.

Mr Johnson: And tell them what it's going to do to Queensland.

Mr BLEIJIE: They should tell them what is going to do.

A government member: Stand up for Queensland.

Mr BLEIJIE: They should stand up for Queensland. I call on the member for Rockhampton—the ghost of Schwarto's past—to stand up and be louder than the former member for Rockhampton. I call on him to have a say. If there is one thing that his constituents will admire about him it will be if he takes a stand on the carbon tax where the former member for Rockhampton did not. I call on the member for South Brisbane and the member for Bundamba. Recently I visited the electorate of Bundamba, where there is lots of industry. During the campaign I visited one particular industrial estate, the name of which I cannot recall, that was having problems with people hooning from about midnight on a Friday and Saturday nights. Those industries in the electorate of the member for Bundamba will be hit by the carbon tax. It will not just hit the businesses; it will hit the employees. I call on the member for Bundamba to stand up against this great big new tax.

How time flies when you are having fun. I have only three minutes to go and I have not even covered the detail of the sustainability declarations yet.

Ms Trad: It's the sound of your own voice.

Mr BLEIJIE: I would like to take that interjection. What was it?

A government member: She said you have a great voice!

Mr BLEIJIE: I think the interjection was something along the lines of, 'He likes to hear the sound of his own voice.' I can tell the member for South Brisbane that the constituents of South Brisbane like what we say in the bill. The constituents of South Brisbane like what every member of the Liberal National Party says about the cost of living. If there is one thing that they will not get out of those opposite, it is taxation relief. If there is one thing that they will not get out of those opposite it is talk about how Labor will ease their cost-of-living pressures. We on this side of the parliament are proud to stand up and talk about this issue for 20 minutes. We are proud to talk about taxation relief, which is something that Queenslanders have not heard from the member for South Brisbane's party for a long time. Never can the member for South Brisbane stand in this place and say, 'I was only elected in 2012 but under Anna Bligh it was terrible, it was terrible.' Tomorrow I will table the photo that I mentioned this morning, showing Anna Bligh campaigning for the member for South Brisbane during the state election. I need not remind the member for South Brisbane of her policy position in the Labor Party. She was a senior member of the Labor Party. She had direct responsibility for the taxation—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ruthenberg): Order!

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will turn to the sustainability declarations, which I mentioned before I went off track. I have said in this place before—and I hate to say, 'We told you so,' but we told you so—we told the Labor Party what would happen and it has happened. We told them that industry would hate it and real estate agents would hate it. We told them it would be a lemon because people have to provide it but not fill it out if they do not know the answers. I sold my investment property to my brother. I rang him up and said, 'I have to provide this ridiculous form to you. I am not filling it out because I don't know. I assume that the half flush on the left-hand side of the dual-flush toilet is more sustainable than the right-hand side full flush. I assume the down lights I have in the house are a little less sustainable than fluoros, but if you want fluoros go ahead and put them in.'

We trust Queenslanders to be able to make those decisions for themselves. They do not need government intervention. They do not need the government to tell them that fans in a house are probably more sustainable than split-cycle air conditioners. We will stick up for Queenslanders. I call on those in the Labor Party to always stick up for Queenslanders and be different from those who were in power for the last 14 years.