




Speech by

Hon. Mark McArdle

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

Hansard Tuesday, 19 June 2012

TREASURY (COST OF LIVING) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Hon. MF McARDLE** (Caloundra—LNP) (Minister for Energy and Water Supply) (7.46 pm): I want to make a short contribution to the debate on the bill before the House, the Treasury (Cost of Living) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. When the shadow Treasurer stood in the House about a fortnight ago he made a comment that the bill had not been before a committee for assessment. I remind the member that this bill actually comprised a package of cost-of-living initiatives that we put to the biggest committee in this state and that is the state electorate. We put it to two to three million people and they had had weeks and months to scrutinise the content of the package to ascertain whether it was right for them or whether they were going to support it. Perhaps if the Labor Party had spent more time in compiling a similar package as opposed to slinging the dirtiest, filthiest campaign in this state's history, they would have had a better chance of achieving something more than seven seats in this House.

I think I am right in that the Labor Party did put one item on the agenda and that, I believe, was the registration of motor vehicles. However, they never took the time to consider the impact of what they had done over 12 years to the lives of Queenslanders. They had never considered the cost-of-living initiatives that we put together to try to assist the mums and dads, the children and grandchildren to gain a better outcome on a day-to-day basis. They sat in the mud and the filth and they made that their mantra. On 24 March the Queensland electorate endorsed our cost-of-living initiatives. That committee said, 'This is the way we want to go,' and there was no doubt that they said to the LNP government and to the Treasurer and the Premier, 'Put this through the House as quickly as possible to give us some relief from the incredible burden we were under from the Labor government.'

That is why we did it. Queensland wanted it. Queensland rejected the Labor government. In fact, they said to the Labor government, 'Enough is enough. We have had enough. It is time for you to go'. It is intriguing in regard to the issue of power that when one goes back to September 2005 I can recall Peter Beattie sitting where the Treasurer is sitting now making comments, followed soon after by Anna Bligh, about full retail competition in the electricity industry. Premier Beattie made this statement in *Hansard* on that day—

We estimate that the vast majority will be better off, with greater competition driving down prices. It is anticipated that the bill saving for most households could be \$150 or more a year.

They were predicting back in 2005 that there would be a household saving of \$150 per year. He then goes on to make this statement—

The evidence shows that no Queenslanders will be worse off with full retail competition in the domestic electricity market.

The sad thing is that I think he believed that statement. I think he honestly believed that that was going to be the case. It is an unmitigated disaster that unfolded right across this state before the people of Queensland. On the same day Anna Bligh made this statement—

Today's changes will allow many domestic customers to make savings on their energy bills.

She then said—

Reliable, affordable and sustainable energy services are critical to Queensland's economic and social wellbeing. Most importantly, it does not matter where you live, nobody—not one Queenslander—will be worse off under the government's proposal.

In 2005 both Premier Beattie and the future Premier Bligh, one hand on heart, one on Bible, said there would be savings; that this would be a bonus to every Queensland household. But let us look at the history of this matter. In 2007-08 power prices were up 11.6 per cent; in 2008-09 they were up 5.83 per cent; in 2009-10 they were up 13.29 per cent; and in 2011-12 they were up 6.6 per cent. Over five years that is an increase of 59.49 per cent in power bills. By my calculation that does not quite equate to a saving of \$150. Everybody in this chamber knows families, including their own, who are finding it harder every day to make ends meet with power prices going up on a regular basis. What astounds me is that when we sat in this House and the now Deputy Premier used to quiz Minister Robertson about the QCA and the cost-of-living increases by way of power, he would try to wash his hands of it, a bit like Pontius Pilate, and say, 'No, it is all their fault, all their problem. We are clean. We have given the QCA the power to make a determination.' We in the LNP did not accept that as an excuse. We did not accept the fact that the QCA had total and almighty power to make a determination as to what should be the future direction of power in this state. Without detracting from the men who comprise the QCA, the Newman government, almost immediately upon gaining power, put in place an interdepartmental committee to make certain that we were going to get a future direction in power prices in Queensland that would result in better and fairer returns for the people in this state who work day in and day out. Equally, we put in place an independent review panel comprised of Messrs Faulkner, Rennie and Bellas to oversee the network charges component of the cost levers driving up power. For 12 years this Labor government had done nothing across a range of initiatives. For five years, when they had the power to look after the people in this state on the issue of electricity, they did nothing. The Newman government was elected on 24 March 2012 and within a matter of weeks we had put in train a process that was going to look holus-bolus at every component of the industry in this state on electricity and report to the government by January 2013 on how we could make it fairer and better. More importantly, we did one thing that the Labor government never did: we froze tariff 11. We made a commitment to the people of this state that we were going to freeze tariff 11. The distinction between ourselves and the Labor Party is that we actually kept our promise. There are those in this House who can remember 2009 when the asset sale promise was broken by the Labor government. That is the distinction that allowed the people of Queensland on 24 March to say, 'You have got to go'.

Mr Langbroek: What year was it?

Mr McARDLE: 2012, my good friend. In 2012 they put in place a government that was going to deliver for them. The member for Woodridge made the comment in her contribution that she believed freezing tariff 11 was a temporary reprieve. Of course it is, but we have also made a commitment that we would do more than that, and we are going to do more than that, as opposed to sitting on our hands like the last Labor government did. It did absolutely nothing. She also made the comment that they wanted long-lasting reform. What worries me is that the member sat for many years in this House under a Labor government that did nothing to assist the battlers in Woodridge, the battlers in Bundamba, the battlers right across the state in trying to help them balance their budget and meet ongoing costs. I think that the worst betrayal is how the Labor government and the Labor rump opposition can sit in this House and support the carbon tax after doing nothing for years and never once raising a voice, a murmur, a dissent, an octave to indicate that they opposed the carbon tax.

Mr Johnson: People did in the election, though.

Mr McARDLE: Quite right, member for Gregory. I will take the interjection. The people in this state had had enough. They know that the carbon tax will increase the cost of their power bills. They know it will increase the cost of every consumable across this state. The Labor rump should hang their heads in shame in 2012 and years beyond and apologise for that. There is perhaps one thing that the LNP should have done better. I cannot rationalise how we can fund 22 support staff for seven Labor members. It is the most over-funded opposition I have ever heard of, matched only by the laziness with which they conduct their business. The laziest, most over-funded, over-staffed opposition in the history of this state—a ratio of three to one. What a mob of bludgers.

In January 2013 a report will be delivered to the government that will drive a new path for the delivery of electricity prices in this state, something the Labor government did not have the intestinal fortitude to do, nor did they have the commonsense to realise that they are on a slippery slope to destruction. The LNP government will get this state back on track.