




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Record of Proceedings, 6 August 2014

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee, Report

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (4.56 pm): As shadow minister for energy and water supply, I always enjoy the opportunity for some quippy repartee with the minister and the chance to personally ask questions of him and officers of his department and GOCs. But due to the new format of estimates, that was not possible for me to do, unless I left my post at the Finance and Administration Committee and important questioning of the Treasurer. I am pleased that the Premier has adopted the Labor Party's position and reinstated the process and format used at previous estimates hearings. If only he had listened in the first place.

The story of the government's record in this portfolio is one of promising big and spectacularly failing to deliver. This has been the case over and over again, and the information revealed during this year's estimates proves it. Members would recall the announcement by the Premier that the government was proposing to construct eight new dams. The opposition sought clarification on the progress and details of these new dams at estimates this year. It was revealed that three sites that were being considered have been set aside for various reasons. Those sites were at Peachester, Cressbrook Creek and Lockyer Creek. In their place, three additional sites were identified—one at Laidley Creek and two at Warrill Creek. The opposition is concerned that residents in the areas that would be affected by these dams are unaware that these locations are being considered for future dam construction. The level of uncertainty around these proposals and the lack of any funding or time frame are also of concern. Once again, it is evident that this proposal is simply a distraction by the government—or perhaps pork-barrelling for how they will use their \$8 billion of future investment. They are promising big but, again, failing to deliver.

Perhaps one of the biggest campaign promises made by the LNP during the 2012 election campaign was the one to lower electricity and water prices across the state. Government members will be familiar with this promise because they were the ones who promised it. Electricity bills were supposed to go down by \$120 a year and water prices were supposed to go down by \$80 a year. The proof of any election promise is in the delivery and, to the lament of nearly every Queenslanders, the LNP has failed to deliver on these promises even if the Minister for Energy and Water Supply cannot bring himself to admit it. Instead of accepting responsibility for these broken promises, the government seeks to blame anyone and anything but themselves for increasing prices. Average household bills are rising by \$442, or by more than 40 per cent, over the first term of the Newman government, and that is after the repeal of a carbon price. The increase in the average cost of electricity under this government is more than 3½ times the total increase from the carbon tax. They promised prices would go down, and prices have gone up. It is that simple. It is a broken promise.

The minister has frequently blamed 'gold plating' as one of the reasons for increasing electricity bills. However, when he was pressed at the hearing by the deputy opposition leader, he was unable to nominate a piece of infrastructure that represented the kind of 'gold plating' he so often talks about.

The fact is that network reliability will be reduced as a result of reforms being considered by the government. The minister has to be upfront with people about that. Despite the Premier promising in December 2012 that there would be no more job losses, it was revealed that hundreds of jobs are still being cut from the energy sector in order to ready the government-owned electricity corporations for privatisation.

In an answer to estimates question on notice No. 15, the minister confirmed that in the 2013-14 year another 567 jobs had been cut from Ergon, Energex, Powerlink, CS Energy and Stanwell combined. That comes on top of the 1,213 jobs lost in the transmission sector in the 2012-13 financial year. This is a rapid and dramatic reduction in staff and the opposition holds grave concerns that the quality and level of service provided by the government-owned corporations will suffer as a result of these savage job cuts. Just like the previous year, there has been a significant capital underspend in the 2013-14 financial year. The energy generation sector's estimated actual capital expenditure was \$220 million in 2013-14, but the budgeted expenditure was \$301 million for that sector, amounting to an \$80 million underspend.

I want to place on record my thanks to the committee secretariat for their efforts, as well as all of the parliamentary staff who assisted with estimates this year not only for the State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee that I was unable to attend but across all committees, including my own Finance and Administration Committee. Despite the warnings from the opposition, the new format for estimates has been a failure and nowhere more so than the undue pressure that was placed on Hansard reporters to ensure that, in particular, the opposition and other non-government members could get timely access to transcripts of proceedings, which had never been an issue until this year's hearings. The opposition warned of this when the original motion was put to the House. We knew that this was all about avoiding scrutiny and ensuring that the media were in a state of confusion as to where they should be covering hearings and when. Thankfully, in terms of Hansard, I finally wish to thank the Clerk of the Parliament for his leadership and pragmatism on this front. I extend my personal appreciation to all Hansard staff for the enormous efforts that they put in over this year's truncated hearing process.