



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Transport and Public Works Committee, Report

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (12.28 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Transport and Public Works Committee estimates hearing. It was a good opportunity to raise some of the priorities that I see for not just my electorate but also rural and regional areas in general. The most prominent issue, which I led with, is airline prices. That is a real issue for people in the west. Airline prices do not affect people just in Mount Isa. They affect people in Cloncurry, Burketown, Boulia and surrounding areas. I see the member for Gregory. They affect his area, as well. When markets are unfettered and unchecked, people take advantage of that.

In the regions airline prices impact people from every walk of life. If someone has a specialist appointment in Brisbane or Townsville, service can become an issue, as it can for people with unwell relatives. Small businesses have compliance issues that they need to satisfy for government, which can mean that they have to send staff away at their own expense. Kids may want to play representative sport, but if their parents cannot afford to send them away they cannot pursue that sporting opportunity, because it is simply too expensive.

I am finding that I am saying no to a lot of family things because we just cannot afford it. These days it is a massive issue. I believe the federal inquiry into these issues was a piece of wet lettuce. It did not do anything meaningful. At the very least we should have price visibility when it comes to the airlines and the airlines forced to produce that inventory, but that has not been done.

My questioning was around airline prices. I moved on to the more specific issue of the software that tracks prices. I know for a fact that the department does not have the software to track airline prices. That software is commercially available. I know people in Queensland have it. It costs about \$20,000. If we had this software we could track the pricing as best we could and then start to combat the pricing. It is very disappointing to know that the department does not have that software because that is the first step to take. I have made representations in that regard before to try to solve that issue.

The next issue I addressed was rail. I have spoken about rail a lot in this House before and I will speak about it again. Rail is a big problem. Some might say it is antiquated or an out-of-date business model. It is great that the government still owns that track. We do not own above rail as that was sold off, but we still own the track. I would say that all users would believe that the business case around running rail is severely flawed and does not get the best outcome for taxpayers or customers themselves. It is begging for action.

There were some announcements made by the Deputy Premier in Townsville which all sounded very positive. Some aspects of those certainly were. The construction of the container facility at Townsville port will be very good. My questions were then around the \$380 million announced by the Deputy Premier. I have since had this clarified. The capital expenditure and maintenance for the piece of track between Mount Isa and Townsville is fully cost recovered from customers. Every time works were announced I used to think it was great, but customers would say, 'Rob, it is not that great because that just puts the price up for us which is the problem in the first place. Our problem is the price.' We have trucks on our roads because rail is too expensive.

I wanted to know whether the \$380 million would go on to the price which would then negate the \$20 million discount concurrently announced by the Deputy Premier. Would that offset the discount? I eventually got the answer afterwards. It was explained that the \$380 million was a pre-existing budget amount. I was probably confused like the rest of the public in terms of how that \$380 million played out. As it turns out, the \$20 million will be a good incentive. It does not fix the problem, but it is a positive step.

I also talked about housing in Burketown. Burketown is a good case in point because we have had problems in terms of the community having a say in who gets housing. In little communities if the wrong people get the housing then it can have a devastating effect. We could have a young family leave town. The community needs to have a say in the allocation of housing in those smaller areas.

I asked about financing. We are in desperate need of some sort of rural development bank for those small towns because traditional lenders will not lend in those areas. The taxpayer is left providing expensive public housing when it could be delivered privately by those who want to build houses themselves. That is the other issue I pursued.

(Time expired)