




Speech By
Robbie Katter

MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (6.25 pm): Firstly, I would like to congratulate the government on their win. Next I would like to thank all our KAP supporters, the hundreds and perhaps thousands of booth workers we had in that now expanding period of the pre-poll, which certainly makes coordination a lot more challenging. For parties of a smaller size like ours it is very difficult to coordinate things like that. We rely very heavily on those volunteers who get paid nothing, and we are very appreciative of their work.

I recognise the valiant efforts of candidates, and I will make mention of ours in the KAP team: Tanika Parker, Attila Feher-Holan, Julianne Wood, Josh Schwartz, Sam Cox, Ciaron Patterson, Christian Shepherd, Allanah Tomlinson, Paul Hudson and Rick Gurnett. I think they all conducted themselves with integrity and gave it their best shot. On behalf of the KAP I also pass on our well wishes to all of the candidates who were unsuccessful. As honourable members would well know, a lot of those people put their life into those campaigns for that short period and a lot of people were bitterly disappointed and really struggled after that election. I think it is important for us to reflect on those people who are not successful because they are part of what makes the democracy robust and provides that competition to keep everyone on their toes. I think it is important to acknowledge the efforts of all those candidates.

I say a special thankyou to my colleagues, the member for Hinchinbrook and the member for Hill, ever reliable—and what a wonderful result for the member for Hinchinbrook. I always joke that the member for Hill can be put under any adversity and he will never lose. The member for Hinchinbrook had a wonderful increase in margin which stands as testimony to the effort he put into that seat during his first term. I also say thank you to our head office: Sarah Major and Anne Pleash. They are highly competent and I am appreciative of their efforts that were well above what they were paid for.

I want to make special mention of my mother, Susie, who is always in the background. She is responsible for a lot more of my dad's political success than he would be willing to admit. I am not sure he is that popular in Charters Towers, but Mum certainly is. I also thank her large band of friends. I am very appreciative. I would be absolutely lost without her. I want to acknowledge my beautiful wife, Daisy, and my daughter, Peaches, for keeping me grounded as well.

Election campaigning for me is a rigorous exercise, but it is a good exercise. I think it is healthy for everyone to be going out and taking the pulse. What are the things people care about? What is going on in the electorate? Let's take a broader view. I would like to think it has been drummed into us in the KAP that we do not want to just be slagging off whoever is in government or opposition; we always want to be offering some solutions when we offer criticism. It needs to be weighted with some solutions.

The KAP put our best foot forward in terms of offering policies that we thought were relevant, making special note of rural and regional areas and in particular North Queensland which we hold so dear. We put forward ideas that we thought could offer people something and give them some hope whilst expanding our economy and making meaningful improvements, not just words that seep out at election time. It is those nation-building initiatives that get the fire in people going.

What are some of the issues? I cannot go past crime. You cannot be an effective MP in North Queensland without being touched by the incidence of youth crime. It is very much misunderstood. I am not saying that I have all of the answers by any means, but I get bitterly disappointed by the level of apathy that I encounter when I talk to either members of government or departments or people working in that space. So many people in that space seem to be disconnected with the reality and what is playing out on the ground.

I was talking to one of the lead civic figures in Mount Isa—this was the second time I have heard this—and as a long-term family they were looking at leaving because they just cannot put up with the crime and they have never seen anything like this in Mount Isa, and it really hurts you when you hear that. We are breaking our backs trying to get things going and keep things going—keep industries going in the electorate to keep jobs there. The health system might be failing and education might have issues, but youth crime is just growing and spiralling. It really knocks the stuffing out of you when people say, 'We think we're getting on top of it,' or, 'We think we're doing enough.' There is no expectation on our part for this issue to be fixed immediately, but there has to be an acknowledgement of the problem, and that is the extreme frustration that I pick up wherever I go. That is why we have previously called for relevant ministers to spend some time in these areas—not just for a day and not just saying, 'We're talking to people on the phone,' but to live there for a week or for a month and then you will really get a feel for what people are saying and they will start talking to you.

We felt that that was such a lead issue. As it stands, it did not move votes. It did not change seats in critical areas, but I do hope that the government would at some point acknowledge that that problem is not going away. It is not getting better and the things in place now are not improving it. That is why we have stuck with relocation sentencing. There is a big gap that still exists. There seems to be a continued space—and I get this every day—where people say, 'There are great programs,' but the people we need to do this do not volunteer for it. They need to be forced to do it and forced into that situation. The only thing you can force the kids to do is to go to Cleveland Bay prison, the youth detention centre. Most of the kids going there—a large proportion of them—want to be there, so it is not much of a deterrent, and it is full anyway, so we need something different.

We know—not we think; we know—that remoteness plays a key part in trying to reform some of these kids. Remoteness is one key part and another is being able to force them into that space and giving magistrates and police that ability to remove those problems out of those areas immediately. That is what is needed. They need to be taken to somewhere that is not Cleveland Bay. That is not the deterrent or the answer at the moment, plus it is full. That is why we have stuck to relocation sentencing as a key part of what we would offer the people in terms of what needs to be done. We hope that the government at some point acknowledges that so we can start to try and fix some of these issues.

The other policy that we ran with was getting the public servants who work in the youth space to come out and volunteer in sport by giving them time in lieu. This is a program trialled by the QPS where they can get time in lieu for involving themselves in some of those sports around town that are struggling. Many sports are struggling to get volunteers at the moment, but someone who works in Youth Justice or Child Safety who is supposed to be engaging with kids in, say, Mount Isa can get four to six hours a week volunteering in an approved sport in that town.

The sport wins from getting volunteers and you have the person getting away from their desk working with those kids in need. If it is the right approved sport—something like Rugby League—you know that those officers are there engaging with those kids where they need to be. Often the biggest criticism is that there are too many people in the offices not engaging with kids on the ground. That is another policy we put out there that we believe goes part of the way to solving some of these problems. We hope it will be adopted sometime in the future and we will certainly continue to push those policies in the parliament.

With regard to the economy, the government—and I heard it again tonight—is very much riding on the success of COVID and its management of it. There is some validity in saying that—I acknowledge that—but there needs to be another thing acknowledged with the whole COVID situation which is never really talked about. Hundreds of billions of dollars worth of cash has been poured into the economy and everyone is thinking, 'Things are pretty good,' and we heard it again tonight from the Treasurer when he said that it has been managed well and the economy is going well. No kidding! You poured hundreds of billions of dollars worth of cash into the economy so things are pretty good, but how does it look in the long term? That is when we need to start looking at industry. What is the government doing about industry?

We heard talk about hydrogen. Obviously I am from an area that is full of front row seats to industry, and the copper smelter came up as a massive issue for me. There is a saying in politics that is highly relevant: success has many fathers, but failure is an orphan. We have been talking about trying to do these things with the copper smelter and getting incentives in place, as the government has always

done. How do you think we built the bauxite and the aluminium industries in the first place and the coal industries? We have to incentivise to get the jobs to get the industry so it keeps pumping money into the economy so we can pay for our hospitals and schools and whatever else.

All I ever hear out in the western areas is, 'How much money can we pull off this railway line and out of these water assets and these electricity assets? How much money can we pull off all of these businesses before we start compromising?' You are finding that threshold because you are at it right now in the north-west. Until electricity prices shot up in Europe recently, the north-west had the world's highest energy prices. Shame on you for allowing that! That is a terrible reflection on management of things out there, and that is why we hang so heavily on the CopperString project. It is a private business going for that, and I note again my relationship with the developer of CopperString. My view is that the government should own this. It should not have anything to do with private industry. This infrastructure was built by the government 30 or 40 years ago. All throughout our history this infrastructure was built and owned by the government. The Great Northern Railway line out to the mine was built by the government and owned by the government.

That is what we want—power stations built by the government and owned by the government. Why are we not building that transmission line now to connect us to the grid? We had a timely reminder last week—another small reason—as to why we need connection to the grid, because we have one monopoly supplier, APA—a global gas giant, a multibillion-dollar company. It is flexing its muscle by taking a super profit from its activities in Mount Isa with the cosy little monopoly arrangement it has now that the government has shut down the only other power station. When its generator went down last week, we all lost millions of dollars.

The copper smelter was shut down for over a day and all businesses around town were unable to do business from two o'clock until six or seven o'clock that night. But that is not the first time that has happened. It has happened multiple times in the last couple of years. We have one supplier. The way to offset that is to be connected to the grid, but that is only a small part of it. If you are a miner out in that region, you are paying \$200 a megawatt hour. The grid price is \$50 or \$60 a megawatt hour, yet they are paying \$200 a megawatt hour in Mount Isa, and they are still competitive. The government is still getting revenue from those mines out there. Connecting us to the grid can get that more towards \$110 a megawatt hour. Imagine what industry in the north-west could do with that.

There was a lot of talk by the government about supporting CopperString. The minister mentioned it again in question time this morning, but it is misleading because all through the campaign those opposite say, 'We support CopperString. We support connecting to the grid.' However, you have to put your money where your mouth is. You have to follow through with that and make sure that it is within the government's ability right now to make it happen as it did 10 or 12 years ago. If you cannot make that happen, I pity us in the future. We can look forward to the continuation of the world's highest energy prices and monopolistic situations. That is the sort of valuable infrastructure we need. When people see that, they think, 'This is a government that's serious about nation building and about engaging in the long-term future and making investments that will create money for us in the future.'

We keep harping on about the Olympic Games. It did come up a lot. It did not come up positively in the north. Some people think it is a great idea. It is not that anyone is against the Olympic Games—we love the Olympic Games—but, crikey, we want some nation-building infrastructure built. We want some big announcements on nation-building infrastructure. We want the same level of commitment to that. We want three ministers dedicated to that in this House instead of three ministers dedicated to the Olympic Games. That is the sort of thing people are looking for and what we try to involve ourselves in.

I acknowledge and thank the government for its help with the copper smelter. There was some good work done there. We are appreciative of that. There were 1,300 jobs saved. It is a pretty big deal if the copper smelter shuts down in Mount Isa. The sulphur from that plant gets taken to make fertiliser at the biggest fertiliser plant in the Southern Hemisphere in Incitec Pivot. That is about 900 jobs. There are hundreds of jobs at the acid plant owned by Incitec Pivot in Mount Isa that takes the sulphur. There is the copper plant itself requiring highly skilled workers. It is one of the rare value-adding industries in Queensland. There is that industry, the bauxite industry, and the refinery in Townsville, but there is not a lot else. There are certainly not many people looking at building these types of industries in the near future, so we have to look after them.

I should have mentioned the jobs at the refinery in Townsville where the copper is sent to be turned into ingots. It is nice to reflect on that. We take that dirt out of the ground and turn it into copper sheeting in Townsville that is ready to be turned into copper wire to be put into houses and electronics and whatever else, but we send that to China. Wouldn't it be beautiful if we existed in an economy where a government said, 'You know what? Let's turn that into wire ourselves.' That is sort the vision we want.

Let me now turn to biofuels. I went down to Dalby and entirely by coincidence witnessed the last grain truck going into the Dalby ethanol plant. It has now shut down. I met the manager there who had repatriated to Australia after being in Europe for many years developing and managing biofuel plants. He came back to Australia excited to help energise and build the industry only to witness its complete demise in Queensland. When I hear the talk about hydrogen and these other industries, I remember years ago in this House we were talking excitedly about biofuels. We got a four per cent mandate of ethanol. Last year I drove to the Sunshine Coast a couple of times. I stopped at every servo and they do not even have an E10 bowser. I checked and there are no fines given for no E10. There was big talk about biofuels but no-one seems to be very serious about it. Was it just talk or was it serious?

In terms of being serious about climate change, E10 in your tank takes 30 per cent of emissions out of your car. We should mandate 10 per cent ethanol tomorrow and force these big oil companies to do it, like they do in the States—there is an E20 mandate in California. Sixty-three other countries in the world mandate ethanol. Every car coming into the industry is tuned in for ethanol. They do not like non-ethanol in the tank. We do not have it because the oil companies seem to be able to out-muscle our governments. Because we do not do that, we deny ourselves a cost-free way of taking the equivalent of 30 per cent of petrol-driven cars off the road.

We would ordinarily be seen as the enemies of the environment, but we are putting forward practical solutions that will get 100 jobs back in Dalby at that plant and underpin a good grain price for the farmers. These are good policies. Why are we not aggressively pursuing those if we are serious about building a future? The only cost of putting E10 in our tanks is to global oil companies. Who are we looking after in this House? Are we looking after APA and the Diamantina Power Station to retain their monopoly? Are we looking after the oil companies so they can manipulate the fuel price system? The Institute of Automotive Mechanical Engineers support ethanol because we know that cars function better on it now in Australia. They are built for it now. We know it is the only way to keep the fuel price down. Not to mention defence imperatives, which is more of a federal issue but we should be concerned about that. It would not hurt for us to be mindful that it will help with fuel security as well. Why are we not pursuing policies like that in biofuel? It is very disappointing.

The last point I would like to make is an observation of a leader of a minor party. During the election we were out there battling away. We put our best foot forward. We think we had a pretty credible campaign, but, boy oh boy, some of the paraphernalia and the army of volunteers from major parties that came out—and I am going to pick on the ALP here more—was very impressive. Let us put that in context. Our ability to fundraise has been reduced. We are hamstrung. We cannot raise any money. It makes me wonder how much third-party money comes into all this. Are these volunteers or are these paid people? This is a distortion of the political process if that is what is happening. It is hard not to think that it is happening here in Queensland.