




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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CHEAPER POWER (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL)

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (8.07 pm): I rise to speak in support of this bill because of the cruel cost-of-living impacts on my constituents, not only in the electricity charges but also in fuel, transport, air travel, sports participation and on and on it goes under this government. Queenslanders know they are footing the bill for this incompetence out of their household budgets. Consider for a moment, if you live in Emerald it is not unusual to face a charge of \$900 for a one-way airflight to Brisbane. I would love the Miles government to consider how unfair that is and add Emerald to the government travel subsidies for rural and remote residents.

The transport tax in Gregory has a huge impact on residents. Everything we use has to be trucked in, from bedding and bricks to knives and forks. Everything we eat has to be trucked in. Year on year, more government regulations and charges and less government investment in our roads and bridges inflates what we call locally the transport tax. Gregory's harsh climate means we rely on electricity not only for comfort—we have 40 to 45 degree days—but also for health and everyday functionality. Our quarterly electricity charges by the state government have been high compared to the south-east corner. A quick scan on Facebook community forums show it is a topic of discussion. Quarterly bills well in excess of \$1,200 are the norm, not the exception. In fact, we have had quarterly bills around \$1,600 and \$1,700 in western Queensland.

On 25 May 2021, when the news broke of a major explosion at the Callide Power Station, I knew immediately there would be some trouble; I just did not expect the trouble to go on for so long. The three onsite firefighters and the 25 Queensland Fire and Emergency Services people who responded to the explosion deserve our highest praise. The plant's cooling towers use hydrogen so fire poses a major risk of further explosions. The first responders showed great courage and skill and they deserve our thanks and gratitude. The Energex and Ergon crews who worked long hours to restore power to the grid all deserve our thanks and praise. On a side note, what might have happened with the power going down in Gladstone, a major industrial area, could have been catastrophic, and I know the minister knows about that.

Australia's modern electricity grid is such that issues in one part create a domino effect in others. When a key generator like Callide C drops out, it forces other generators to shut down in self-defence. The Callide C explosion resulted in widespread blackouts in parts of Queensland and northern New South Wales, but this was only the initial paragraph of a long and sorry saga. The Callide C plant is Queensland's newest coal-fired power turbine. Built in 2001, it should have had years of service left in it. Almost immediately in Central Queensland, those in the know were blaming the underfunding of maintenance. This put a slant on the ministerial statements in the House the following day, 26 May 2021, when the then premier told the House that Queensland was confronted with something that had never happened before in history—an explosion and a major fire in a Queensland power station. What

an achievement from Labor but one we could have done without. Minister de Brenni assured the House that work was already underway to investigate the cause but that the No. 4 turbine would probably have to be replaced. The Treasurer had a tear in his eye as he told the House—

The ability to be agile, to adapt and adjust is built into the design of our publically owned energy companies from generation to transmission and distribution ... ensuring the reliability of our energy supply.

Then the cooling towers collapsed. Ironically this week marks three years from the explosion on 25 May 2021, and we can still cannot get an explanation of what happened and when it will be put right. One thing is for sure: the locals nailed it on the day it happened. Whistleblowers have since come forward to explain how chronic underfunding of maintenance by our state government caused the explosion. It also emerged that, while the publicly owned CS Energy held a major share of the plant and operated the site, there were actually two other major shareholders—namely one from China and a Czech billionaire. Two of the shareholders wanted to see the professional report by Dr Sean Brady which the Miles Labor government has buried. Those other shareholders may be due for some compensation if the lack of maintenance was a contributing cause. They have gone to court in a stunning indictment of the Queensland Labor government's culture of cover-ups and secrecy. The legal fallout is likely to run for years. The Federal Court has ordered a fresh investigation. Yesterday the *Australian* newspaper headlined its report 'Secrecy over Callide C explosion turns to farce'. Some four hours of testimony from engineer Dr Sean Brady yielded few answers, not through any fault of Dr Brady but because he was prevented by CS Energy's lawyers from answering many of the questions put to him. Journalist Nick Evans wrote—

If there was ever any doubt that CS Energy is desperate to prevent the causes of the incident from being made public, Monday's farce in front of federal court registrar ... made it pretty clear.

There is also action being taken by the Australian Energy Regulator alleging the failure of the Queensland Labor government to comply with the performance standards of the Callide C power plant. As the saga has gone on, the recommissioning date has continued to be pushed back. Locals say that the replacement for the No. 4 turbine was secured but languished in the Port of Gladstone because poor bridge and road maintenance meant transporting it to the plant was a real problem. I know the shadow minister for transport has been highlighting that issue, and it has been a real problem. We cannot get critical infrastructure to power our state because of poor road maintenance and bridges that cannot continue to take heavy loads. We have to wake up to ourselves: we are Queensland; we are not a Third World country.

In the meantime, the latest report from the Australian Energy Regulator showed that Queensland is producing less electricity at a higher price than other states. There you have it: the \$1,000 subsidy is a bribe to Queensland voters to ignore the fact that electricity bills are as a result of Labor's policies and Labor's incompetence. Under Labor, Queenslanders are not only facing power bill pain; they are being mugged by the steepest cost-of-living rises in the country: 19.9 per cent for electricity; 6.7 per cent for health costs; 18.5 per cent for insurance costs; 7.4 per cent for sports participation; and 4.2 per cent for transport costs—again, these are the highest in the nation. This affects little Sally and Billy who want to go to a sports carnival and want to be part of a camp. We are facing massive increases in sports participation costs of 7.4 per cent. They are not going to netball anymore; they are not going to the Rugby League camps anymore. People are struggling to give their kids this opportunity because of the increased costs under this government.

On top of this, Queensland is facing a rental crisis and a housing crisis which government policies have also contributed to. While the LNP will not oppose this subsidy because we recognise Queenslanders are suffering, we also trust that they will see this as just a bandaid. It is like finding money in the washing machine: it is not new money; it came out of your pocket. That is what has happened! This is not new money; it has come out of Queenslanders' pockets. You know that, Treasurer; you know that very well.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bush): Through the chair.

Mr MILLAR: Through you, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Treasurer knows that it is coming out of our pockets, and he knows that very well. It is not coming out of his pocket. This subsidy is the same and I hope that, while Queenslanders will take the short-term relief, they will know it does not resolve the underlying causes of Labor's incompetent government. Labor is trying to buy the next election. We are four or five months away from the next election and Labor are just trying to buy the election with \$1,000 in everybody's pocket and then Albanese gives \$300 as well: 'Let's try and buy the election. Let's not be competent, responsible governments understanding the budget.' I commend this bill to the House.