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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BILLS

**Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2011-2012,
Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2011-2012,
Appropriation (Parliamentary
Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2011-2012**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Monday, 23 May 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Mr SIDEBOTTOM

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(Braddon) (NaN.NaN pm)

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (17:49): The member for Paterson just gave his doomsday delivery on the budget and the policies of this government—his usual approach since he has been in opposition. I remind the member for Paterson of a couple of things. He goes on about the lack of an analog signal in his electorate. He is well aware that he would have black spots anyway.

Mr Baldwin interjecting—

Mr SIDEBOTTOM: No, you sit and listen for a moment; we listened to you. This government has continued that program and will be moving to a conversion to digital, as he well knows. If he wants to go on about the rollout of digital terrestrial tower signals and continue to claim that that is cheaper for those people in black spots to receive than satellite reception then why not talk about the ongoing maintenance costs associated with terrestrial signals from towers? Of course he will not do that because he knows that the satellite system is the only sensible system to provide digital television. I see he is leaving the chamber—as he always does when anyone raises anything about his comments on his own electorate. What he also does not comment on is the fact that satellite transmission of digital signals will involve not only all the channels available in the metropolitan areas but also a local news coverage on a specific designated television channel for his area. But, of course, he does not tell the people of Paterson about that, so I will for the record.

He also trumpeted the same sorts of arguments on the program to provide set-top boxes for older Australians. We all know that the cost is not just the cost of the set-top box itself. We know it involves a suite of programs to support the installation of the set-top box. It involves the wiring and antenna orientation, if that is required. It also involves support service for over 12 months thereafter to ensure that the users of the set-top box are getting the right services and using the set-top box correctly to get the digital signal. So it is part of a whole range or suite of associated things provided. Those opposite know that, because they supported the legislation when it came into this House. This has been in process now for some months and those opposite supported it.

But News Limited come along, with a few of those on the other side, to ape an argument on this. And of course out it comes—here we are looking at another example of the so-called installation fiasco. It is absolute nonsense. Those on the other side know it. News Limited know it, but it is not in their interests to promote anything positive. We are quite happy to support older Australians who need support in setting up for the coming digital conversion. It has worked in Mildura, it has worked in other places and it will continue to work. But those opposite do not want to talk about that.

The other thing that was trumpeted by News Limited and aped on the other side was this great so-called class warfare allegedly driven by this budget. When you look at the figures for the family tax benefit—both what is given and suspended for some time—you can see that it is an absolute nonsense. In the main, families will in fact be much better off because of this budget, and the figures substantiate that. But is that what is in the media? No, it is all about so-called class warfare and how middle-class families have been hit unnecessarily by this budget.

What we tried to do with this budget was to be fair and to be responsible and, through it, we are trying to achieve the aim of getting the budget back into surplus by 2012-13. That is exactly what the budget sets out to do. It is made up of savings of \$22 billion and it has a number of expenditures to assist families, to assist the economy and, in particular, to assist small businesses. Whilst doing that, it aims to keep the parameters of our economy in check so that we can, indeed, go into surplus as promised in 2012-13.

Listening to the member for Paterson, who echoes the arguments about the economy of many on that side, you would never believe we went through a financial crisis. According to the member for Paterson, we have done nothing to maintain this economy in its relatively sound position compared to other countries—to keep the economy strong and in a better position to service our debt than most countries, if not every other country in the world. Those opposite know we have done that. They may quibble about where we spend money and where we may have savings, but the Leader of the Opposition, in his reply to the budget, could not specify savings. He would not specify where the revenue will

come from for any expenditures. All we got was this headland vision of waffle and negatives all the way.

If you look for the Leader of the Opposition's line-by-line reply to this budget, his detailed criticism of it—and indeed when you look for that in the media—it is missing. Any substantive analysis of this budget is essentially missing. I expected to hear that detailed criticism from the other side, but all we got was what Tony Abbott is very good at—slogans and vague comments. When he is asked to be accountable, he cannot be accountable.

That inevitably led to the sorts of tensions that arise in those opposite. We know that the member for North Sydney was upset by a number of the so-called assessments by those opposite and we know that he has been in conflict with his leader. We know that others on that side are greatly disappointed by the Leader of the Opposition's inability to provide anything of substance.

The Leader of the Opposition is calling for a change in government—'Let us go to an election,' he begs. Why would he want to go to an election? Is it that we do not have any legislation passing through this place? I do not think so. Indeed, substantial amounts of legislation have been passing through this place and there will be more. Is it because this legislation has no substance? No, it is not. Legislation passes through this place, the Australian economy continues in its development and this House continues to function. So, gee, Tony—Leader of the Opposition—why do you want another election? Tony was upset that, when he thought he could bribe and buy his way into government with members from the crossbenches, they saw through it. In fact the more he offered them, the more they were determined that he was not fit to govern this country—and nor is he.

Even if our polls may not be as high as one would expect, I will tell you what—the Leader of the Opposition's polls are no cause for comfort for him or those opposite. So what does that tell you? You can argue that there may not be substance in everything we do here, but I tell you what—there is no substance in the Leader of the Opposition and those opposite know it. If you were hoping for a little miracle this year, forget it. This parliament will go its course. The Australian people expect that and that is exactly what will happen. Things change, my friends, as you will see.

I think this budget provided a fair balance to the Australian people and to people in my electorate in particular. I refer to some comments in my local newspaper. I would not say that the commentator is a big fan of Labor. I would say that he is pretty independent. He says of the budget in part that there are:

Many worthy budget measures, some less so and some icebergs coming up.

That is quite a reasonable assessment from his point of view. We will see. We all know that there is legislation on very important matters affecting the economy coming up. I think many Australians are looking forward to this playing out, and play out it will. The commentator from my local newspaper, apart from raising a few problematic

things, says:

... the welfare-to-work measures are needed and excellent.

Those on the other side, in their feigned interest and care for those on welfare, claimed that what we were trying to do was beat people with a stick rather than support them. When you actually look at the measures we are implementing, you see that they are indeed to support, to encourage, to enhance programs which exist now, to get people who are dependent on welfare into work, in particular to try to isolate areas of need that require support. In my area, the municipality of Burnie has been designated as one of 10 areas requiring further assistance. That is on top of all the programs that exist currently and there is funding available to support personnel and further programs, driven from the bottom up, to assist people who are on welfare into work and into training. As the commentator from *The Advocate* goes on to say:

... the welfare-to-work measures are needed and excellent. As are \$2.2 billion to fight mental illness and targeting skilled migrants at regions that need them.

Australia must maximise its workforce, especially given population ageing and the significant opposition to immigration; with many opponents struggling to differentiate between refugees and the skilled migrants needed in the mining boom.

There were not masses of new, locally specific announcements, and nor should there have been.

This is a time for belt tightening and a time when regional rorts should be kept to a minimum.

That is not to bag worthy government spending—and I am very pleased to see this—

such as the North-West and Northern funding for job-creating ventures, which appears to have been a great success.

Indeed, this government, along with the Tasmanian government, provided \$17 million for business

enterprises in the north-west in particular and in the north—in the light of the paper mills closing and the closure of Tascot Templeton, the carpet factory in East Devonport, and McCain's processing plant, or part thereof, in Circular Head—who put their own money in as well to grow their businesses. In fact, they had something like 121 applications, with many more millions of dollars to invest. Thirty-five projects were successful and provide already 200 jobs, and indeed look to fulfil the target of 400 jobs. So that is working very well in my electorate and is an excellent investment in our region, along with the people who are making it happen. The commentator from *The Advocate* goes on:

Also, for all its issues, the Rudd stimulus was a positive for the economy.

But now it is time to rebuild the nation's bank balance.

On a final note, many economists have made light of the government's desire to return to surplus by 2012-13.

They may be technically right, but they are also mistaken.

Having the national books in the black would be a big psychological plus in an economy where public confidence has taken a battering.

I think that, in a sense, is a fair assessment of this budget, warts and all. It offers fair savings and reasonable expenditure in areas of need, particularly trying to grow the economy, to grow jobs, to grow apprenticeships, to grow skills and training and, of course, to support education. I would also thank the government to this point for its selection of part of my region to receive extra assistance to support jobless families, young parents who are unemployed and the long-term unemployed. Unemployment is entrenched in some parts of my region and needs this extra support.
(Time expired)

(Braddon) (NaN.NaN pm)