



Sharon Grierson MP
Federal Member for Newcastle

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Budget Appropriation Bills

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (9.17 p.m.)—I am pleased to speak on the [Appropriation Bill \(No. 1\) 2008-2009](#), and related bills, for the first budget of the Rudd Labor government. Let me put on the record my admiration for the Treasurer, the Minister for Finance, the Prime Minister and, of course, the support team behind those people, for the package they presented to this country on 13 May this year. It delivered an excellent Labor budget aimed at addressing Australia's current economic circumstances, delivering on Labor's election promises, particularly for those in need, and investing in the future for all Australians. It is a responsible budget that delivers for working people. In this budget we have delivered on our commitment to help working families with the cost of living with a \$55 billion family support package. This package delivers on personal income tax cuts that provide incentives for individuals to participate in the workforce. These are important and responsible tax cuts for those who need them most. For low- and middle-income earners in my electorate of Newcastle they will be very welcome. With the average annual income of \$43,000-\$44,000, these are people who have waited a long time for some support.

This support package will also provide eligible parents with a 50 per cent education tax refund and a 50 per cent childcare tax rebate. Having the childcare tax rebate paid every three months instead of once a year is also a significant benefit to families. It helps them with the most important task they have: ensuring that their children get the best possible care and education.

Another issue of importance to families is health care. The working families package, which delivered \$491 million to the Teen Dental Plan, \$220 million to establish GP super clinics and \$3.2 billion for health and hospital reform, is one the public of Australia have very much appreciated.

We have delivered on our commitments to make it easier to save, to buy a first home, and to increase the supply of affordable rental housing. We have also expanded the eligibility for the carer payment, the utilities allowance and the \$1,000 lump sum bonus. In all, the budget has provided \$2.4 billion to Australian seniors and carers, with the seniors bonus, utilities allowance and telephone allowance making pensioners more than \$400 better off this year than they would have been. However, we do realise that our pensioners are doing it tough and that is why the adequacy of pensioner and retirement incomes will be thoroughly examined in detail as part of the government's review of Australia's tax system. Certainly, one of the main things we can do for

pensioners, and indeed for all Australians, is to put downward pressure on inflation. In this budget we are addressing inflation, running at a rate of over four per cent right now, by delivering a strong surplus of 1.8 per cent of GDP. Every dollar of new spending has been more than matched by spending cuts. Growth in real spending will be 1.1 per cent in 2008-09—the lowest rate for nine years. By putting downward pressure on inflation, we put downward pressure, we hope, on prices and interest rates.

We have also established three new nation-building funds: a Building Australia Fund, Education Investment Fund, and a Health and Hospital Fund. These funds will provide around \$40 billion for future capital investments, to modernise and reinvigorate the Australian economy, tackling the productivity challenge. For the first time in 13 years, this Labor government has well and truly dealt the Commonwealth back into the nation-building game. After the 'never, ever' and the non-core promises of the Howard era, the Rudd government has also got the Commonwealth back in the business of keeping its promises.

In Newcastle those promises are worth a great deal to us. For Newcastle, in the area of climate change, it means the budget delivered on the commitment of \$100 million for solar research, to be administered by a new Australian Solar Institute, building on the work of the CSIRO in Newcastle. It also means \$25 million supporting clean coal and advanced fossil fuel technology development. In Newcastle, the exporter of the largest volumes of coal in the world, we know that getting clean coal and other low emission technologies right is important - not just for us but for the nation and the world. So I note that the Minister for Resources and Energy has recently released draft legislation for the world's first carbon capture and storage regime. This is a very positive step towards creating an environment in which industry can confidently invest in CCS projects and support the commercialisation of new technologies that move us closer to our goal of sustainable energy in our region and our nation.

Similarly, the investments we have made in solar research will help to demonstrate solar thermal technology, integrate solar into alternative fuels production, develop solar for hybrid applications and develop other advanced solar technologies. In Newcastle, I am proud to say that we do stand ready, willing and able to play our part in a sustainable energy future.

The budget also delivered on transport and infrastructure for us, with \$15.76 million for the Weakleys Drive interchange, helping to finish this vital project in the north-western part of my electorate. There was \$15 million to complete planning for a dedicated freight track between Strathfield and Newcastle—extremely important to relieve pressure on the F3 freeway and to get goods quickly to ports. The budget also provides for improved security screening at regional ports, including at Newcastle. In the area of defence, supporting RAAF Base Williamstown in my electorate, the budget set aside \$15.4 million for capital works projects.

In education, one of the most significant announcements for us was the \$13.7 million grant for the University of Newcastle to improve its infrastructure and facilities, helping it to invest in areas of priority and to further develop its reputation as one of Australia's

most innovative education institutions. I note the positive comments from Newcastle University's vice-chancellor about this grant and also about other aspects of the government's higher education package, which certainly does invest in an education revolution for our universities.

In the sport and recreation area, the budget finalised Labor's commitment in the last election campaign of \$10 million to help upgrade EnergyAustralia Stadium. This \$10 million provided by the Rudd government, along with an additional \$20 million announced today by the NSW state government, will allow the absolute completion of the upgrade of our stadium to a world-class 33,000 fixed-seat facility. This is a great outcome for EnergyAustralia Stadium, for our sporting teams and for all their very loyal fans. It is also a great boost for our regional economy, putting us in a position to bring bigger and better events to our region. The Prime Minister has flagged that the federal government will support a 2018 World Cup bid, and the upgrade in Newcastle means that we now have a sporting chance of being a part of the biggest sporting event in the world, and certainly any other international competitions that come our way. I have lobbied hard but I congratulate the people of Newcastle in my electorate. I particularly pay tribute to Ted Atchison and the Hunter International Sports Centre Trust for their ongoing commitment to building the case and the community support for an upgraded stadium.

In the area of health we have not only delivered on our commitment to make the Calvary Mater Hospital's PET scanner Medicare eligible but also committed \$1.5 million in the 2008-09 budget for a one-off grant to support upgraded PET facilities at the Mater. PET is a highly advanced medical imaging technique which produces three-dimensional images of the body. It is particularly useful for designing the best course of treatment for cancer patients and is also used for the assessment of other conditions, such as epilepsy. The government funding will help the Calvary Mater Hospital to buy radiopharmaceuticals, increase radiation shielding, upgrade equipment and buy the new PET scanner. A further \$700,000 will fund Medicare rebates for the additional PET services that will be provided by the improved facilities.

This is something that we have lobbied hard for for over three years. At the 2004 election the Labor opposition did pledge to support PET scanners and provide Medicare licensing for them. In 2007 we again made that commitment, dragging the member for Paterson to match that. I am proud to say that the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, has gone far further than just giving a Medicare licence. We will now have an outstanding facility servicing not just the people of Newcastle and the Hunter region but, of course, the people of the whole North Coast and the New England area as well. This is a great outcome for patients in Newcastle and in the wider region who travel to the Mater for diagnosis and treatment. We are delighted that health is a very strong commitment for us. We will see two super clinics coming into the region in my colleagues' electorates. They will certainly assist with the shortage of GPs that we have been experiencing. The budget also secures funding for the GP access after-hours service in our region, one of the first in Australia and certainly a model for the rest of Australia. So it was a great budget for health care needs. I am pleased to see that Newcastle is also receiving funding for a new childcare centre in the Hamilton-Merewether area of my electorate. It is one of the identified areas of need and one of

the first of the 38 childcare centres that will be delivered across the country as part of the government's \$114.5 million funding stream.

So for us it was an outstanding budget, one that rewarded Newcastle people for their loyalty but also rewarded their effort in putting forward their regional case and their case as a regional capital for the leadership they provide in so many portfolio areas. This was a great Labor budget that delivered on the commitments we made to the people of Newcastle at last year's election. It delivers some hope for the big issues and the big projects that we need to keep looking forward to and lobbying for and working hard towards.

In my electorate we are pleased to see that the health and hospital fund for medical research facilities will be a way forward for the Hunter Medical Research Institute to apply for its very much needed funding. The budget also has an allocation for a scoping study for building a Federal Court in Newcastle. That means that we will put in a submission to the 2009-10 budget. We are very much looking forward to support for that submission to build a new Federal Court facility, a 10-court facility. At the moment we have four courts. We are suffering the highest number of security incidents and risks in the country due to the space restrictions and the pressure that puts on the users of our Family Court. Newcastle is a growing city and has a university with a law faculty. The recommendation from the Family Court of Australia is that it be the priority for the next Federal Court of Australia. It is wonderful to have opportunities to support such worthwhile endeavours.

In conclusion, this was a budget that was good for the nation, that was good for Newcastle and that certainly invests in our future. I will keep working with my electorate to deliver the best possible cases to this government. Keeping in mind the tight fiscal environment that we are operating in this year, that we have been able to achieve so much in one budget is something that I think the Australian public, if the opinion polls are to be relied upon, do appreciate. We will keep working on the future and, with a Labor government, I know that future will be much better.

Debate adjourned.