Mr HATTON (Chief Minister): Mr Speaker, I rise tonight to advise the Assembly that the Leader of the Federal Opposition, Hon John Howard, tonight delivered his response to a federal government's budget. In that speech, which has only just concluded, he provided the Australian people with a realistic alternative. In his speech tonight, Mr Howard made the point that in his trip around Australia, through the cities and provincial areas, he had been told 3 things continuously: people believe that governments are taxing too much, spending too much and interfering too much. Those sentiments are fully supported by this government and are reflected in our actions and activities and in the way in which we are approaching our budgetary responsibilities. It is a shame that the current federal government could not look at least half the way down the road. Quite rightly, Mr Howard pointed out tonight that the current federal budget is one of too much tax and too few acts.

Tonight the federal opposition reiterated its undertaking to put a freeze on spending during its first term, cutting out the plethora of quangos, boards and commissions that consume money and interfere with the community. He stated that it will drop the fringe benefits tax, the capital gains tax, taxation on lump sum superannuation and the pensioner assets test. Those are just a few of the measures included in a wide-ranging package announcing what the coalition will do when it comes back into government after next election. There is no doubt that it will be in government after the next federal election.

However, Mr Speaker, I must make a point that can be drawn by implication from a statement of the federal Treasurer. That statement was that there are no expenditure commitments by the coalition government. I draw particular attention to the Alice Springs to Darwin railway line project. Our government recognises the need for restraint and hard decisions. Our government has been demonstrating its equal willingness to make those hard decisions. However, the coalition needs to recognise the importance of this railway for Australia. That railway is not merely a sop to the Northern Territory. It is not a drain on the Australian taxpayer. It is a capital project that will provide jobs, generate wealth, stimulate private enterprise and open up the vast and untapped wealth of northern Australia to create wealth for Australia through international trade.

We are promoting it as a project that will not be a drain on the Australian taxpayer because it is to be built and operated by private enterprise although, as I have said in this Assembly, it may require some initial government equity. This project deserves the support of the federal government and I will be taking the first opportunity that I have to be in Canberra to press the point with the federal coalition and demonstrate that this project is an economic, rational and visionary project for Australia, and one that the federal government should support.

I made the point before and I will make it again: the project will provide economic advantages for Australia. It is a major project...
for this nation. It is something that Territorians have paid for time and again. They have paid for this railway by having to endure 75 years of colonial rule by the Commonwealth government. Our citizens have paid that price and they have not yet received the other side of that contract that was negotiated in 1910. We do not intend to allow any federal government to forget that obligation. I will be going to Canberra and putting to the coalition the arguments for the railway line in order to ensure that it remains on the agenda for the new federal government which will come to power after the next election.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.