



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard 20 July 2000

UNEMPLOYMENT

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (6.10 p.m.): I rise to second the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. There is no doubt that the Premier's 5% unemployment target was a cynical ploy. The commitment—the promise, the target, whatever members opposite want to call it—to get 5% unemployment by 2003 was definitely a cynical ploy on the part of the Premier, the then Leader of the Opposition, back in 1998. We know that for two fundamental reasons. The first is that no sooner had it been said than we started to see a plethora of excuses being offered for why he could not reach it. The second reason we know it was a cynical commitment is that it has made absolutely no impact at all on the policy implementation of this Government, policies which have been directly against the encouragement of employment in this State.

The excuses came thick and fast. Let us look at the first excuse. On election day the Premier woke up and found out supposedly that Asia was in crisis. We were not going to be able to reach the 5% unemployment rate because on his pager he had found out that Japan had just moved into a recession. The fact is that Asia had been in crisis in financial terms for quite some time and that fact was spelt out in the coalition Budget.

An honourable member interjected.

Dr WATSON: It was certainly known and discussed beforehand, but the potential implications of the Asian crisis were spelt out in the coalition Budget back in May of 1998.

When that no longer held water, when the Asian crisis turned around, when Korea, Malaysia, Thailand and more recently Japan started to move out of their recessions, he changed his tune.

The next thing was the participation rate. I have this graph of participation rates. The participation rate in Queensland since July 1998 has varied between 64.9% and 65.1%.

Mr Borbidge: Flat lining.

Dr WATSON: It has been flat lining. It has not changed. We can go back a decade and we will see exactly the same thing. It has not changed. That has always been the case. Not only has it not changed—and the commitment should have been made with that in mind—but the Australian participation rate has actually increased from 63% to 63.7%. So while the Federal Government has been dropping unemployment across the country, the participation rate is actually increasing. So the argument about the participation rate is fallacious; it is empty.

Interstate migration is another furphy put forward by the Premier. Interstate migration has fallen. Interstate migration was running at 54,000 a year in the late 1980s and 1990s, although I would argue that interstate migration actually adds to economic growth more than anything else. At any rate, if interstate migration was an issue it certainly was not an issue for this particular Premier, because interstate migration has fallen.

Mr Horan: It has halved.

Dr WATSON: It has halved; it has decreased to about 30,000 a year. It has gone down to that from 54,000.

Mr Hayward interjected.

Dr WATSON: It went down, and after it hit the bottom it went up by 3,000 or 4,000. I said about 30,000. That is where it is; perhaps it is 32,000. The point is that interstate migration has fallen dramatically from what it was earlier. It is not an excuse.

Interest rates and GST are not excuses either. Why are they not affecting the rest of Australia? Why is Queensland suddenly out by itself where unemployment cannot be lowered because of interest rates and GST? It is not having an effect anywhere else. Unemployment in every other State is going down. The Commonwealth unemployment figures, which are national, are all showing a downward trend.

The other reason it is a cynical ploy is that it has had no effect on policy implementation. It has not stopped the Government introducing policies which are clearly anti-jobs, anti-business and anti-investment. The Government's dealing with industrial relations legislation, payroll tax and greenfield sites mitigates directly against a reduction in unemployment.

Time expired.
