



Speech by

Hon. ANNA BLIGH

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

Hansard Wednesday, 22 August 2007

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Infrastructure) (6.01 pm): I rise to oppose the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. What we have before us tonight is the usual mixture of policy hypocrisy, policy confusion and policy paralysis. There are so many reasons to vote against this motion that I do not have time in the five minutes allotted to me. Let me turn first to the beginning of the second part of the motion which recommends a no disadvantage test be conducted so that ratepayers can be assured of a number of things. I have lost count of the number of times that the opposition has been given an opportunity to support a no disadvantage test for workers when it comes to their basic entitlements like long service leave, overtime and penalty rates. Every single time those opposite have been given an opportunity to support a no disadvantage test for workers they have walked away from it; they have voted against it.

Mr Seeney: Here's your chance.

Ms BLIGH: To walk in here proposing a no disadvantage test is nothing short of staggering hypocrisy. But perhaps most alarming is the method by which those opposite propose to achieve the no disadvantage test. They propose to achieve the no disadvantage test by guaranteeing that ratepayers will not see a rate rise above the CPI. There is only one way to achieve this and that is for the state to basically prohibit local governments from increasing their rates by anything more than the consumer price index. In the very same breath that they are pronouncing the importance and the independence of local government—

Mr Seeney: You don't understand what's going on at all.

Mr SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, please.

Ms BLIGH:—they are seeking to fetter the right of local governments to determine and manage their own finances.

Mr Seeney: That is not right.

Ms BLIGH: It is fundamental to local government operation that they are able to set their own rates. They are accountable to their constituents for those rates.

Mr Seeney: Pauline Hanson's way: take a falsehood and build an argument on it. Your original proposition is wrong!

Mr SPEAKER: Deputy Premier, can you take your seat for a moment. I am aware that the Leader of the Opposition has already been warned under standing order 253 and I would ask him to desist from further continued interjection.

Ms BLIGH: I will read the relevant parts of the motion again for the benefit of its mover—

2. a no disadvantage test be conducted so that ratepayers can be assured that—
 - Rates will not rise above the CPI;

Whatever method is used to assure that, it will see local governments unable to make a decision to invest in a major piece of new infrastructure and put up their rates accordingly and go to their constituents and put that argument. Then it is up to the constituents whether or not they support that. That is how a democracy works. That is how local governments have worked. This government will not be moving in to set rates for local government. We will not be limiting their ability to see their rates rise by more than the CPI if that is what the council determines. That will be a matter for their constituents to decide whether or not they vote for them at the next election.

When those councils do take into account their financial requirements in the next six months—in the next six years—they will have to take account of many of their financial circumstances. When they do they will be looking, for example, to what the state government provides them by way of financial support. In this financial year how much money will the Queensland state government be providing to support the operations of Queensland's local councils? Just over \$788 million. It is a very sizeable investment—a well-placed investment in the activities of local government. What sort of support do members think they get from the federal government? Do members think it comes close to \$788 million? It is just over half that, at \$455 million.

Frankly, if John Howard really cared for one minute what happened in local government in Queensland, if he really cared about the needs of those very remote councils servicing very large parts of this country, he would be matching us dollar for dollar. He would be putting up the dollars out of his surplus to provide these councils, which in many cases struggle to provide the services they need, with support for roads and increased infrastructure, whether they are being amalgamated or not. But members will not hear one word from John Howard about more financial assistance. We did not see it in this budget and we will not see it in the election campaign because it is not a level of government he cares about. Everything he has said in the last six weeks on this issue has exposed him as a fraud. John Howard's agenda here is a fraudulent agenda. He is not prepared to put his money where his mouth is, not one cent into the real issues that face local government.