



Speech by

Stirling Hinchliffe

MEMBER FOR STAFFORD

Hansard Wednesday, 16 April 2008

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT REGULATION (NO. 1): DISALLOWANCE

Mr HINCHLIFFE (Stafford—ALP) (8.05 pm): I rise to speak against the disallowance motion moved by the member for Warrego. The ill-considered actions of the former Aramac Shire Council that have led us to tonight's debate have been canvassed in a slanted and distorted way by the members for Warrego and Gregory. I wish to dispel particularly the myth that the regulatory action in this instance was in some way anti worker.

In moving this motion of disallowance, the honourable member for Warrego suggested that the government's motives for revoking Aramac Shire Council's well-intentioned but ultimately inappropriate wage rise was anti worker. I would like to take this opportunity to remind the House that this very same member recently voted against the passage of legislation to protect the employees of local governments from the ravages of WorkChoices. The Local Government and Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2008 sought to protect the take-home pay, job security and conditions of local government workers. The member for Warrego and the opposition voted against that then necessary and sensible law. So, on the one hand, the honourable member spins his newly minted working-class credentials by seeking to disallow this regulation and, on the other hand, he votes for council employees to be put on individual contracts that strip away their hard-fought conditions and penalty rates.

This regulation is hardly anti worker. This regulation is about good governance. It is about ensuring that the budgetary decisions of local governments are made within a proper and considered process and in accordance with established corporate planning processes. The reality is that Aramac gave its employees an ill-considered pay rise, well above the rate of inflation, without considering whether it would be sustainable or whether it would even be achieved within the then council's budgetary framework. As such, the government took the only responsible course of action and revoked the resolution. If the resolution had stood it would have committed the new Barcaldine Regional Council, led by my friend the mayor, Rob Chandler, who is a dedicated person—a person dedicated to the future of the central west—and his council to an unfunded wage increase that would have jeopardised the delivery of existing services to that local community. This is clearly not in the public interest and the government has taken the appropriate steps in this situation.

As to any suggestion that this government has not provided adequately for the welfare of local government employees, I merely have to point to our record. It was this government that passed the Local Government and Industrial Relations Amendment Act, as I mentioned, which killed off that potential for local government employees to fall into the discredited and inequitable clutches of WorkChoices laws. It was this government that put in place a three-year staff support package that protects job security, enhances staff retention and provides certainty for local government staff in the face of those concerns raised by the member for Warrego. That was the measure. That is the record that this government stands on.

It was this government that made it an intrinsic part of reform that local governments must develop new enterprise bargaining agreements with their workforce within the first 12 months of operation.

Compare our record with the record of the opposition and any reasonable observer will know which party has the best interests of our great state's local government workforce closer to heart—an opposition that would be happy to see local government workers on individual contracts without hard fought for conditions and pay, or this government which has put the ongoing interests of local government workers front and centre during this overdue reform process. This House should reject the disallowance motion.