



Speech by

Hon. Rod Welford

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

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MOTION: ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGE

Hon. RJ WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Education and Training and Minister for the Arts) (2.50 pm): Words, words, words. 'We have a wide-ranging strategy,' the deputy opposition leader said. It is mumbo jumbo, Lord of the Congo. He has got nothing specific to say, nothing specific in terms of how they would manage any of the issues he just spent the last 10 minutes rambling on about.

Ms Palaszczuk: What did he say?

Mr WELFORD: That is a good question. Does anyone remember what he said? It is clear that the deputy opposition leader still sees the world as it was seen by the National Party more than 25 years ago—that is, the only way that any state operates in relation to the national government is them and us. It is all about them and us. It is all about the rest of the world against us, Queensland against the world. It is put up the barricades, pull down the shutters and do it all in the dark.

This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for the state, with its \$17 billion Capital Works Program, to partner with our federal colleagues in a cooperative effort to stave off a recession in this country and in this state. The first signs of serious recession—namely, the loss of jobs of Queenslanders—have already been seen in some of our industries here in Queensland. We do not want to wait and sit on our hands, as the opposition would have us do, and do nothing until the recession bites, until literally thousands of Queenslanders, all of whom have families depending on them, are thrown on to the job heap, thrown out of their jobs. We want to get in and plan to invest public funds wisely, efficiently and effectively to provide resources that people need to keep jobs and to provide the infrastructure to build the future of our state—infrastructure like educational infrastructure.

This is about ensuring that there is a continued level of investment in our economy so that when the private sector slackens off the government steps into the fold and makes up the slack. That is what good government is about in a liberal democracy like we have—a mixed economy. Good government is all about ensuring that, when the private sector goes flat, the government keeps the engine room of the economy running and people in jobs.

I would like to say something in my capacity as education minister about the \$14.7 billion for educational infrastructure—the Building the Education Revolution initiative of the Rudd government. Our government has been working very closely with the federal ministers, the federal Treasurer and federal officials to ensure that we get our share of that \$14.7 billion. The state schools and their non-state school colleagues in Queensland look like being able to achieve something like \$2.7 billion in investment over the next three years in our schools. For me, this is a real opportunity to bring all our schools—state and non-state—right up to speed with the technologies and the quality facilities they need to provide first-class education.

With 1,250 state schools and 400-odd non-state schools around Queensland, we know that the Catholic sector, the state school sector and the independent schools all struggle to have sufficient resources to continue to improve their schools, refurbish their classrooms and introduce the new technologies that are required for a modern education—new science lab facilities, new language lab

facilities, libraries that are wired for technology, the internet and computer use. These are technologies which simply did not exist in schools 30 years ago, and maintaining those new facilities in all of our schools is an enormous task. Here is our opportunity, with \$2.7 billion over the next three years, to make it happen.

The programs will be divided basically into three areas. Firstly, there will be a \$12.4 billion program to build or refurbish large-scale infrastructure in primary schools, P-12 schools and special schools with a focus on libraries and multipurpose centres such as school halls. Lots of primary schools which were built before the most recent schools did not get a school hall as part of their new facility. This is our opportunity to provide every reasonable sized primary school that needs a hall with a school hall or a multipurpose centre. It is also an opportunity to ensure that many of those older schools which have tiny, one-room libraries—where everything is crammed in and they are trying to introduce computers—will now be able to get a whole new library, space permitting in their school campus, or a significant upgrade to their existing library.

Secondly, there is a \$1 billion program across Australia for up to 500 new science labs or language learning centres. Our secondary schools can well do with this investment and we will be in there bidding on behalf of Queensland schools to ensure we get our share. This is about \$2.7 billion worth of not only facilities in schools but jobs in Queensland, and that is what our government is dedicated to achieving. The opposition can criticise, complain and carp because that is all it has ever been good at, but what we are about is getting on with this building program, creating the 120,000 jobs that the Premier has mentioned and also ensuring that, when it comes to education and jobs in Queensland, we are achieving as much as any state in Australia.

Approximately 2,000 projects have already been identified by my department of education for progression under this initiative. This is an opportunity we have to respond to what schools have been asking for for years. Not every school has been able to achieve its priorities through the regional processes because schools with higher needs often got them first, but now there is an opportunity for those schools which have been knocking at the door to get the facilities they have been anxious to get but have not been able to get through the system with the limited resources of the state. They will be able to get in on this program and have their aspirations met.

It will mean that more than a million weeks of work will be created in providing our schools with new facilities and new projects that will benefit the future education of our children in the 21st century. What is more, it will enable us to reprioritise our State Schools of Tomorrow funding and drive every one of our own dollars further into more projects than we were otherwise able to achieve. We will be able to give schools these new language labs, science labs, libraries and school multipurpose centres with federal government assistance and then provide even more facilities, such as new sporting facilities, upgrades to other classrooms, refurbishments and the introduction of wireless technologies in schools around the state where that is needed.

We are investing over \$125 million this year in maintenance alone, which is more than double what was invested in the maintenance of our schools last year out of our own state funds. Again, that investment in maintenance as well as a capital works program of more than \$530 million this year on top of the money that the federal government will make available—namely, \$128 million this year—will see our schools benefit significantly from this initiative.

Let me conclude on this point: this is not about playing politics. It is time that politicians around the country came together and recognised that in the heat of a recession we need to work to save jobs and to use the opportunity to invest public funds wisely to build the future of our economy. The federal government recognised that, and that is why it has chosen to invest in education. That is why it has chosen to invest in insulation to ensure the efficient use of energy across our nation. But no investment can be more valuable, more effective or more enduring than an investment in the education of our young people and the skills of our nation. Our government will be party to such an exercise as quickly as we possibly can. We 100 per cent wholeheartedly endorse this shared investment in schools throughout our state—

Mr Nicholls: Tell us where you're going to spend the money.

Mr WELFORD:—including schools in electorates such as those of the opposition member who interjects and other members of the opposition.

Mr Nicholls: Tell us which ones.

Mr WELFORD: Stop sitting back whinging, carping and complaining. Join with us in calling on the federal government and the federal parliament, including their colleagues in the federal parliament, to pass this legislation to ensure that states can benefit from it now and into the future.