



Speech by

Ronan Lee

MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY

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MOTION: ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGE

Mr LEE (Indooroopilly—GRN) (3.10 pm): This motion is at best unnecessary and at worst a phenomenal waste of the time of this House. Greens leader Bob Brown made the suggestion as part of the negotiations with the federal government that at midnight tomorrow night the package be voted on. There is no need to be spending the time of this parliament today debating whether or not the Senate should be rushed to vote on the \$42 billion stimulus package a day early. Forty-two billion dollars is a lot of money and there should be reasonable and considered scrutiny applied to it. The package needs significantly more equity in terms of its spending. In its original form it did not include the sorts of energy efficiency mechanisms that the Greens have managed to have added to the ultimate package.

The Senate has a legitimate role of review. The Greens are working to improve the package not with a sledgehammer, as the Liberals and Nationals would suggest, by simply opposing it but with fruitful, responsible and sensible negotiations with the government. The package needs to be significantly greened up and it needs to give more to the poor and the needy. There are some significant omissions and, quite frankly, some errors. This is due to the fact that the package was put together in such a hurry. I think it was put together with not quite enough care.

I want to talk about what Labor would do to students who live within my electorate. I refer to a case of students not being enrolled by 3 February. The date of 3 February is not the usual enrolment date for university students, TAFE students and other people who should be qualifying for the \$950 bonus. It is not the usual census date for educational institutions. Students may have been on holidays or working through the summer and may not have filled in all their enrolment materials. Under the package in its original form as presented by Labor and which this government is proposing should be hurried through, those people would miss out on a bonus payment that they are entitled to and that they should receive. That is why it is so important that there are sensible negotiations undertaken and that the Senate's role of review is accepted and not rushed. This is not something that we want to do in a shoddy and speedy way. This is something that needs to be done with tact, finesse and a little sensible negotiation.

There needs to be more heart in the package. Unemployed people simply were not given a far go in the original package. For instance, the liquid assets test that the mean-spirited Howard government changed from \$5,000 to \$2,500 should be back where it was originally. There are suggestions that there will be hundreds of thousands of Queenslanders out of work over the next three years. We need to make sure that we do what we can so they are not forced to run down their assets—run down the money that they have saved over the years—to an unreasonably low level before they can access unemployment benefits. This is something that the Greens are working to achieve and I think we will achieve in the ultimate package.

The package needed to include far more energy efficiency mechanisms. They were not in the original package. The Labor government simply did not think of this. It was not on its radar. How can we think it is smart to propose to build housing for people who are needy and put them in the sort of housing that is the most expensive to run. Housing for needy people should be the most energy efficient available, not the least energy efficient. How can we ask people with the least capacity to pay for things to live in

homes that have the highest running costs? These are the sorts of things that should have been in the original package. These are the sorts of things that the Greens will negotiate into the ultimate package.

That is why this process should not be rushed. That is why this parliament should not be asked to put pressure on our senators to move more quickly than is necessary. Anyone who thinks that the spending of \$42 billion of public money should not have appropriate scrutiny has no role in government and, quite frankly, I feel has no role in parliament. There needs to be appropriate scrutiny and the package needs to be significantly greened up.