



Speech by
Simon Finn

MEMBER FOR YEERONGPILLY

Hansard Wednesday, 5 August 2009

APPROPRIATION BILLS: ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

Mr FINN (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (2.45 pm): I rise to address report No. 2 of Estimates Committee A, which examined proposed expenditure in the appropriations for the Premier and Minister for the Arts, Treasurer and Minister for Employment and Economic Development, and Minister for Public Works, Information and Communications Technology. Primarily the work of this committee considered the appropriation that paves the way for the recently elected government to deliver on our commitments. At a time when Queensland faces the worst of economic crises, the underlying principle of this appropriation is how Queensland addresses an economic crisis that is not of our making but does impact on us. The key issue in framing the budget is the need to address the shadowing of revenue streams. As an economy with heavy reliance on mineral exports, the impact of the economic downturn on our trading partners has cascaded to impact on us.

The fundamental flaw of the Howard government's GST is its failure to cope with a decline in consumer spending, particularly on luxury items, when times are tough. As spending declines, the tax take declines and the returns to the state decline. Along with this comes a hit on state revenues through, for example, levies on property transfers, which are affected by declining property prices and turnover rates.

The Premier and Treasurer took commitments to the election just five months prior to the estimates hearing that outlined how Queensland would tackle the crisis. Front and foremost of delivering on our commitments is the commitment to protect and create jobs. The core commitment to the people of Queensland was to make the tough decisions to maintain the biggest infrastructure-building program in the nation, to protect the jobs of Queensland families, and advance the key infrastructure needs of the state with a vast geography.

Continuing projects like the building or rebuilding of 10 major hospitals was central to election commitments and is central to the appropriation as this provides the essential funds to deliver on these commitments. Consideration was given in detail to Queensland's AAA credit rating and the need to plan for a return to this rating. Both the Treasurer and Premier addressed measures in the appropriation that chart the path back to a AAA rating.

The Premier and Treasurer were examined on the appropriation measures to deliver on the government's commitment to return the state's budget to surplus. Of critical importance to regaining the support of ratings agencies and returning the budget to surplus is the capacity to retire debt, and both the Premier and Treasurer outlined the central element of the assets sales program, which is foregoing significant debt—debt that is contained in the balance sheet of our GOCs but which is added to the equation when ratings agencies evaluate the state of the Queensland economy.

The Bligh government is also committed to invest in training and skills development. It is essential that, as we come out of the economic downturn, we are not in the same place as previous federal governments have left us in previous downturns—that is, with a massive shortage of skilled workers. The appropriation measures contained in the matters before the committee included allocations to the Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative and the Green Army, both of which deliver on the government's core election commitments with particular focus on job creation.

In relation to the Minister for Public Works, the scrutiny considered issues including the commitment to deliver its part in the nation-building economic stimulus plan, a commitment to create jobs in regional Queensland, and the design and safety of the Kurilpa Bridge.

In a previous debate regarding the first report of this committee, I commented on the civility and cooperation of deliberations of the committee, and I again note this and thank all the members for their participation. I should note, however, that non-government members have submitted statements of reservation, all of which are very similar in their criticisms of the estimates process. I have become used to these statements, as they are submitted every year and the text changes very little.

This committee sat for nine hours on the hearing day as well as met on the day and a couple of times both prior and since. We considered 80 questions on notice. Whilst the allocation of time for questioning during the hearing was generally balanced, the ledger favoured questioning of non-government members. At no stage was the question time limited. Matters taken on notice were addressed prior to the completion of the hearing. A free flow of questioning was permitted and extensive detail was considered throughout the process.

As the chair of Estimates Committee A I am satisfied that the proceedings of this committee have enabled adequate scrutiny of the allocations to these portfolios. Whilst in my contribution to the discussion today I have not addressed many of the issues considered by the committee, I believe that the estimates process ensured that the ministers could outline how the appropriation is delivering on the government's commitments and also enabled non-government members to examine the same. I thank the members of the committee secretariat who provided support to the committee and all of the people appearing before the committee. I commend the report to the House.