




Speech by

Hon. Glen Elmes

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Hansard Tuesday, 27 November 2012

MOTION: PUBLIC SERVICE, JOBS

 **Hon. GW ELMES** (Noosa—LNP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs and Minister Assisting the Premier) (5.51 pm): I rise to second the amendment moved by the Treasurer. This government's goal is to reform and renew the Queensland public sector to make it the best public service in Australia. The topic of tonight's debate goes right to the heart of discussions currently underway regarding an appropriate size for the Queensland Public Service. In proposing this stupid motion tonight, the opposition has highlighted the cause and effect of the dire financial situation this government inherited from years of Bligh-Beattie irresponsibility. The cause is poor financial management from successive Labor governments between 1998 and February 2012. The unfortunate effect is that, as a result of that mismanagement, we now have to have a debate about what sort of public service we can afford.

For years, rather than being honest with the state about their mismanagement, the Bligh government chose to make heroic predictions about income and sneaky underestimates of expenditure. The result was an increased annual deficit and compounding debt. For the past few years they could not even afford to pay the public servants from consolidated revenue; they had to borrow just to pay the fortnightly wages bill. The people of Queensland are entitled to a public service that provides the services they need and a public service that has a responsibility to deliver those services as efficiently and in the most professional manner as possible. Having more public servants does not automatically equate to a better public service just as having fewer does not mean a less effective public service. We want the best public service that the state can afford and we have set in place a range of initiatives to achieve just that.

The government has a responsibility to utilise taxpayers' money in a way which provides the best possible service to the greatest number of people within existing financial constraints. The previous government did not understand the last part of that equation. That is where the current budgetary problems originated. They saw no problem in driving the state further into debt without even asking themselves: is this the best way to spend the money we have? Financial constraints is a foreign term to the Australian Labor Party. It may as well have been Greek with all the negative financial connotations that go with that. The result is that we are now faced with having to reshape the services government can provide to bring them into line with the funds that we have to pay for them. It is basic economics. If you spend more than you have, then you incur an extra expense, which is the interest on borrowings. If you let borrowings get out of hand, then interest payments can become one of your biggest expenses, and that is the case in this state. Every dollar spent on interest payments is one less dollar available to be spent on staff and services. The lower the debt, the lower the interest payments and the higher the level of public service that can be provided to ordinary Queenslanders.

I understand that the need for redundancies has been difficult for many people. However, this government has sought to treat people with dignity and respect and we have offered fair and reasonable redundancy offers with real taxation benefits. If anyone has a complaint about what is happening now and they are looking for someone to blame, they should look no further than the previous Labor government. Three of the current Labor members who were part of a cabinet which authorised every left wing, loopy idea that came before it are sitting on the front bench of the opposition benches right now.

The focus of this government as far as the Public Service is concerned is to reign in the massive debt and retain as many Public Service jobs as possible. However, we cannot do it alone. We need recognition from public service unions that wage increases exist within a broader environment. Wage negotiations is not just about what workers want but also what the employer can afford to pay. Unfortunately, due to the incompetence of the previous government, we cannot afford the larger wage increases and expensive agreement conditions being sought by unions. New enterprise bargaining agreements have recently been negotiated with teachers, salaried medical staff, TAFE teachers, and Transport and Main Roads employees. Discussions are currently underway with unions on various other EB arrangements which are due for renewal. We have made fair offers in the current circumstances in which inflation currently is at 1.4 per cent and we inherited from the previous government a state debt of \$65 billion which is rapidly heading towards \$85 billion. These are times when restraint is needed from all parties so we can retain as many Public Service jobs as possible. If the various unions are serious about representing their members, the best way to do that is to work with us and find savings, flexibilities and efficiencies in the Public Service so that we can retain as many jobs as possible.