



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

BILLS

Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2014-2015

Consideration in Detail

SPEECH

Monday, 16 June 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Keenan, Michael, MP

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Mr KEENAN (Stirling—Minister for Justice) (17:34): I must say, I do admire the shadow minister's front to roll in here after 40 minutes of consideration in detail, which only lasts for an hour, and complain that government members, who happened to be in the chamber, were asking questions. It is very difficult for me to respond to the opposition if they do not come into the chamber and ask me questions. One hour is allocated every year for budget consideration in detail, yet the shadow minister has come in here after 40 minutes has expired and asks me why it is that I had to respond to questions from members who actually were here in the chamber. Quite remarkable! But I do admire his sense of humour, if nothing else.

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Andrews): Order! The minister will be heard in silence.

Mr KEENAN: The shadow minister was very keen for me to enlighten him—and of course I am very keen to enlighten the shadow minister whenever I get the opportunity to do so. I would like to give him a bit of history about proceeds of crime in Australia and how it came to pass that we committed those proceeds of crime to the Safer Streets Program. Governments of all persuasions, up until the advent of the Gillard-Rudd era, had spent proceeds of crime money on fighting crime. It stands to reason that, if you are going to take money from criminals, you would subsequently reinvest those funds—

Mr Feeney: Madam Deputy Speaker, I have a point of order on relevance. I did not ask for a history lesson. Can he please answer the questions that have been asked of him?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I ask the minister to be relevant to the questions.

Mr KEENAN: I am very keen to be as helpful as I possibly can be for the shadow minister. I am not sure if he is aware of the background. This background is vitally important to understanding what has gone on in this process. It is important to understand because governments of all persuasions have spent proceeds of crime money on fighting crime. This happened under the previous Howard government and it happened for the first few years of the Rudd government until the government got so desperate with their out-of-control spending that they looked for any pockets of money they could use to prop up the budget and pretend that they were running a better budget bottom line than they were. They froze the proceeds of crime and said: 'This money we have taken from criminals is now going to be used against the member for Lilley's dodgy figures to pretend that the budget is in better shape than it is.' This is what happened and it was a shameful thing.

Money that should have been used to fight criminal activity was actually used to prop up their dodgy bottom line. I think that is shameful. When we were in opposition we decided that that was a very bad decision. It was a bad decision for law enforcement and it was a bad decision for communities where that money could have been spent. So we said in 2012: 'We are not going to accept this. We will unfreeze proceeds of crime and will reinvest it in community projects all around Australia that make our streets safer.' Subsequent to that I spent a lot of time talking to communities about what their priorities might be. We spent a lot of time going around Australia talking to local members and community groups about what their priorities might be. We subsequently made a series of commitments at the election that we of course will keep. Like all of the Abbott government's commitments, we are going to make sure that they are kept. We made promises to communities, such as the communities in Swan, Lindsay and Higgins, and said that we would stand with them and fund community safety initiatives that they believe are going to be useful to combat crime within their local area.

That is the right thing to do, as opposed to what the Labor government were proposing to do with the proceeds of crime. They were going to sit on the money and use it to prop up their dodgy budget so they could pretend their budget was in better shape than it was after their years of excessive spending. If we had not come in and made the very important decisions that we made to unfreeze the proceeds, then there would have been \$112 million accumulated within that fund up until the 2017-18 financial year.

The Labor Party spent outrageously in government. They went around looking for whatever pots of money they could use. They froze proceeds of crime money—money that would have been better spent within the community, money that would have been better spent on law enforcement all around Australia and money that we will reinvest in making sure that criminals all around the country find it harder to commit their foul deeds.

Mr Feeney: Madam Speaker—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I call the member for Swan.

Mr Feeney: That's impossible.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Batman will resume his seat!

Mr Feeney: But you insisted in opposition that you would not take dorothy dixers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Batman will resume his seat! I call the member for Swan.