



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Regional Assistance Program: Funding

SPEECH

Thursday, 9 November 2000

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Questioner
Speaker Fitzgibbon, Joel, MP

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Mr FITZGIBBON (Hunter) (9.52 am)—I begin today by thanking the member for Hinkler for two things: the first is for highlighting, once again, the Prime Minister's broken promise on petrol prices and the impact of the GST, and the second is for highlighting the National Party's duplicity on this issue. Back in their electorates they are screaming blue murder over petrol prices, but here in Canberra they are doing something very different. In other words, they are here supporting the Prime Minister's stubbornness on this issue and his refusal to give relief to the motorists who so well deserve it.

I want to begin the main part of my contribution today by quoting from the webpage of the Sydney based Wine Society. It reads:

The Wine Society grew out of a visionary idea and a spirit of friendship. The idea was that if a group of wine lovers got together, they could find and buy excellent wines more easily and affordably than any individual could.

That is quite an admirable thing to do. The Wine Society was started in 1946 by a Sydney neurosurgeon, Dr Gilbert Phillips. Until now, the society has sold its wines only to its 55,000-odd members. But that is about to change. The Wine Society is now embarking on what could be described as a commercial operation, selling fine wines to any comer, and it is using an e-commerce strategy. The question I want to pose today is this: should the Sydney based Wine Society be receiving Regional Assistance Program money to establish a wine centre in The Rocks in Sydney? The question has to be asked whether this investment will create jobs in high regions of unemployment. Will some \$300,000 of Commonwealth money, designated to assist the regions, go to a wine centre in The Rocks in Sydney?

I must say that Minister Jackie Kelly has already answered those questions. The Wine Society went to Minister Kelly for money under the Regional Tourism Development Program, but she decided that she was having difficulty finding any merit in the project in terms of assistance to the regions. The New South Wales Department of State and Regional Development came to the same conclusion. Whilst it is a worthy project and a project I would be happy to support in any way that I could, both Minister Kelly and the department found it very difficult to see how this project was going to assist unemployed people in the region.

The last question that has to be posed is: on what basis did Minister Reith, under the Regional Assistance Program, determine that building a wine centre in The Rocks in Sydney was going to help unemployed people in regions such as my own region in the Hunter, where wine tourism is very important? I am calling upon Minister Reith today to table the application from the wine centre and disclose the basis on which he made his decision.
(*Time expired*)