



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

ADJOURNMENT

New South Wales Budget

SPEECH

Thursday, 18 June 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Ley, Sussan, MP

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Ms LEY (Farrer) (12.57 pm)—I would like to talk about the New South Wales budget and the effect it will have on my electorate of Farrer in western New South Wales. The New South Wales budget announced on Tuesday concentrates on the greater Sydney metropolitan area, to the detriment of rural New South Wales to the west of the Great Divide, and sadly that comes as no surprise to those of us who live in rural areas. The New South Wales Treasurer, Mr Eric Roozendaal, provided empty rhetoric in his budget speech and very little of substance for regional New South Wales. I thought that overall the budget lacked economic credibility and tied New South Wales to an enormous deficit which will see many more people joining the unemployment queue.

In his announcement, the Treasurer of New South Wales says that New South Wales is forecast to remain in deficit for the next two financial years but will return to the black with a modest surplus in 2011 before bouncing back up into a much larger surplus in 2012. So he waves away the state's largest plunge into the red since 1992 and assumes that the state economy recovering from the global financial crisis in the ensuing few years will give rise to increased consumer spending and increased housing activity and bounce the state budget back into surplus. That is copying Mr Rudd's heroic rhetoric on our own federal budget.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)—The member will refer to members by their appropriate titles.

Ms LEY—Roads only rated four mentions in the Treasurer's speech. He failed entirely to mention disabilities. Also absent from the budget speech was any mention of a major nation-building project to improve infrastructure and provide jobs. In fact, the infrastructure spending that we saw in the New South Wales budget was directly channelled from federal infrastructure spending. Without the injection of the federal stimulus package into New South Wales this would have been a much unhappier picture. Although an additional 250 new police across the state were announced, the Treasurer gave no commitment to increased policing in regional New South Wales, where we desperately need more police to cover the vast areas and distances and the increasing crime rate. There is no specific funding for schools in the region but there is money for school maintenance across the state. That is hopelessly inadequate.

The budget failed to recognise the need for strong investment in roads, transport and rural infrastructure. In fact, when you consider that the budget does not allow any additional spending other than the barest, basic maintenance on roads, I do fear for western New South Wales, which has an enormous road network and an ever-diminishing proportion of the state's road budget. The Treasurer of New South Wales probably never travels in a modest 10- to 15-year-old car on those roads. If he talked to those who do so daily to get to hospitals, health systems and care for their disabled children, he might feel that he should direct some more attention to this important area.

The budget provides little hope for rural families struggling to make ends meet. Farmers and rural businesses are now hit with a triple whammy—the world economic crisis, the New South Wales recession and the ongoing drought. Almost half of New South Wales remains drought afflicted and it is of great concern that the budget shows no funding allocated for drought relief. I ask the New South Wales government to continue the funding for its critical drought councils, which are located in key areas of New South Wales and doing a fantastic job on the ground helping farmers—a great complement to our federal drought support workers. That funding needs to be continued with a horizon longer than six months.

While the budget includes more than \$16 million for operation works programs in irrigation areas, 66 per cent of New South Wales is still drought declared. It will take a lot more to recover. So drought assistance is a must. Last year there was \$19 million allocated; this year there is absolutely nothing. I saw in the budget a complete rehash of old projects being announced. A lot of the money that was announced has already been allocated by the federal government and or previously announced by New South Wales. Health remains the No. 1 priority for every Australian but particularly for those in rural areas and the spiralling cost of health care continues to be a drain on the state's coffers, with a record \$14.5 billion for delivering health services. There is no sign of that

budget being brought back into the black and back to a situation where people turning up at the casualty sections of the hospitals can get good treatment—(*Time expired*)