



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Border Protection

SPEECH

Wednesday, 14 March 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Brodtmann, Gai, MP

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Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (16:14): I cannot believe the audacity and gall of the member for Stirling putting up this matter of public importance today, particularly after the comments that were made by the shadow Treasurer and by the opposition leader in the last week and in fact over the last six months. It is absolutely outrageous. I cannot believe his gall. He has no understanding of the public service. He has no appreciation of what public servants do. He has complete disdain for the public service. He has complete disdain for public servants and he is constantly maligning them. I cannot believe it. This MPI's title should read: 'The threat posed to Australia by the opposition's planned decimation of Canberra and services to the Australian public.' That would be more accurate, because that is what the member for Stirling, particularly his leader and the shadow Treasurer, have been saying over the last week. I remind the member for Stirling of what he has been saying, which underscores their disdain for the Public Service and for public servants in this town and throughout Australia. Their crocodile tears are extraordinary; their audacity is breathtaking. Last Monday, the member for North Sydney said on 7.30:

... a lot of people in Canberra are spending a lot of time duplicating the work of the states. For example, there's a Department of Health in Canberra with over 6,000 employees. Not one of them is a doctor or not one of them is a nurse treating a patient - not one.

That is extraordinary. What could these people be doing? They are implementing government policies. They are providing support services to the doctors and nurses on the frontline of health services. They are implementing the Gillard government's \$2.2 billion mental health program. That is what they are doing. He went on to say:

Well of course; if you wanna reduce the size of the government, if you wanna get rid of the waste—

that is how the member for North Sydney views public servants; that is what he thinks of the Public Service in Canberra—

if you want to keep your commitments on track, you're gonna have to make hard decisions.

So public servants throughout the country, not just here in Canberra, are thought of as duplicative and as waste. That is the view of those opposite towards public servants and the Public Service. So for them to come in here today and cry crocodile tears about the impact of supposed budget cuts on these agencies is absolutely outrageous and incredibly audacious.

On *PM* last Friday night, the Leader of the Opposition was speaking about his commission of audit, which is going to be absolutely wonderful. He pondered whether the federal health department really needs all of those 6,000 current staff. Then he focused on the federal education department and asked whether it needed its 5,000 current staff when the Commonwealth does not run a single school. I go back to my original point: those opposite have no understanding of what the Public Service does. They have no appreciation of the Public Service and no appreciation of public servants.

When I hear such comments, particularly those of the last week, from those opposite, I am reminded of 1996. In 1996 the Howard government got rid of 30,000 public servants. That is probably three-fifths of the population of Wagga—I think the population of Wagga is about 50,000. That is quite an extraordinary chunk of humanity that was taken out of the Public Service. The member for Cook talked about facts. The facts are that those opposite have already talked about cutting 12,000 Public Service jobs. In the last week they have talked about cutting 6,000 jobs from the department of health and another 5,000 from the education department. Just today I heard that they are looking at getting rid of the Defence Materiel Organisation. From memory, that would be about 6,500 jobs. So we are already up to 29,000 Public Service jobs that would go. That is fast approaching the 30,000 that were lost during the late nineties under the Howard government. I remind all those present today what that meant for Canberra. Canberra lost between about 15,000 and 20,000 jobs. That meant that house prices plummeted, small businesses closed down and local shops closed down. It gutted local shopping centres, which have not

returned to what they were before then. It meant that Canberra went into a recession when the rest of Australia was growing. It took us years and years to recover. But the impact of those cuts was felt not just in Canberra, but in the region. If you still had a job and you could afford a holiday you might go down to the coast, where you would see that two-thirds of the houses were on the market. It had a huge ripple effect in the capital region, on Queanbeyan, Yass, Wagga, Griffith, Leeton—the whole region around here.

Mr Keenan interjecting—

Ms BRODTMANN: You are talking about budget cuts and the impact on jobs. This is what that means. The truth hurts. This is the future that you have for Canberra. I am putting a mirror up to you about the future of Canberra if you do what you have planned for it and the Public Service.

I remind those opposite of the reality of what is happening. We are introducing a new one-off increase in the efficiency dividend. A number of small agencies are exempt from this one-off increase. Our expectation is that agencies will cut spending in non-staff areas—for example, for consultants, contractors, travel, hospitality and entertainment, media and advertising, printing and publications—and will implement more efficient and consistent delivery of training. We have also set up a working group, comprising the CPSU and senior people from government departments, which has already met. That is looking at the impact of the efficiency dividend. We already have a strong track record on identifying efficiency reforms and making responsible savings. Since coming to government we have delivered efficiency reforms of over \$10 billion. Our decision to reduce agencies' departmental capital budgets is estimated to save about \$710 million over three years. This measure has had no impact on public sector jobs. Our agenda is not designed to slash Public Service jobs; that is the target of those opposite. Our policy is to make the Public Service more efficient; their policy is to make the Public Service non-existent.

I also remind those opposite, and Canberrans as well, of what happened in 1996. I was one of the people who lost their job. I was posted overseas with Foreign Affairs and my position was abolished. I came back here and had to reapply for jobs. There had been 50 jobs in the area where I was working, and that was reduced to eight jobs. At the same time, Chris had resigned from his job. He came back to an economy that was in recession and he worked part time for many years as a result of what happened to us in 1996. So I speak from experience. You throw these figures around as if they are meaningless. But these are people, these are families, these are men, women and children and a community that you want to decimate as a result of your blithe disdain for the Public Service.

I want to speak about the future plans of those opposite for the Public Service. They are going to decimate and take out all the skill sets that already exist in the Public Service. What does that mean for the services we provide for the community? There will be no services—but I suppose those opposite do not actually have any policies. So far I have counted three policies. There is paid parental leave, and there is a bit of dispute about that. There is asylum seekers, and there is a bit of a dispute about that. There has also been the announcement today on Customs, and it is good to hear that they have got a policy. We have also got the \$70 billion black hole that they have got to service, and that is essentially three times the budget of Defence or two or three years of community services. It means decimation for Canberra. *(Time expired)*