



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Main Committee

APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 3) 2008-2009

APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 4) 2008-2009

Second Reading

SPEECH

Tuesday, 24 February 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Tuesday, 24 February 2009 Page 95 Questioner Speaker Sidebottom, Sid, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
---	---

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (7.49 pm)—It is a pleasure to follow the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Procurement. I thank him for outlining very succinctly and fairly the economic situation that exists both globally and in this country. I monitor what my colleagues are speaking about in this place—not necessarily sitting in this chamber or in the main chamber of the House but certainly in my office—and

I found it a little disturbing to listen to the member for Mackellar's diatribe against, particularly, the Prime Minister. Mind you, that has been a long-term thing, rather than a short-term thing. She claimed that our attempts to stimulate the economy, both in the short term, the more immediate term and the longer term are wrong, wrong, wrong, without offering any clear alternative to that.

I note that the member for Mackellar and others on the other side have belittled some of the more specific projects that the government is encouraging, particularly the economic stimulus package in relation to education, particularly for high schools and primary schools. Indeed, I would just like to remind you, Mr Deputy Speaker and, through you, my colleagues of what the then shadow minister for finance and now the shadow Treasurer said on Seven's *Sunrise* program on 13 February in relation to the package on education:

Well let me tell you—

of course, he would have been 10 times louder—

we wouldn't be spending \$14 billion on school halls. I mean that is a phenomenal amount of money. \$14 billion ... That is just ridiculous.

I can tell the member for North Sydney and anyone else who questions that part of the stimulus package that there are many primary schools and secondary schools in my electorate which are highly excited by the prospects of that section of the stimulus package. They are indeed pleased to be able to have a maintenance budget that will help them out in many ways. Many speakers before me, and no doubt after me, will be able to tell you how they want to spend that money.

But in terms of this 'wasted money,' according to the member for North Sydney, on school halls, libraries, language labs and science labs, not only are they a welcome addition to those schools, particularly in providing better learning and teaching opportunities for those in those communities, but they are massive local economic stimulators. I am sure many on this side of the House, and no doubt those on the other side, are receiving very positive responses to that initiative. The opposition must find it very difficult to explain to those schools and those communities why they voted against that very important education and economic stimulus package that was announced.

The Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2008-2009 and cognate bill before us are about spending to provide the government's programs. Only on Friday did I have the privilege of attending one of our Better Regions launches, or turning of the sod, as it is called, at the Ulverstone Showgrounds Redevelopment. This saw a commitment of \$2 million from the federal government, in conjunction with the state government's \$2 million and the over \$2 million commitment of the local council for this very exciting redevelopment, which happens to be at the home of my basketball club, the Mighty Hoppers, of which I am still president. Hopefully, they are winning at this very moment at home! That was an example of Better Regions working in partnership with my local community.

It is pleasing to see eight other Better Regions projects currently underway in my electorate, to the value of over \$8½ million. Those are the types of appropriations that we are talking about and those are the types of programs in partnership between the federal government and local government, and the state government in a number of instances, all stimulating our local economies, all stimulating economic activity in the short term and which will provide important future infrastructure, both physical and social, for our communities.

I would also like to raise a number of projects outside of those I have mentioned in the Better Regions program. I note that my good friend the member for Hasluck has arrived in the chamber, and she reminds me of my Better Regions projects, but I would like to talk about some other initiatives brought about by community demand,

input and partnership. The first is in the area of the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. I note that work to bring digital television to beautiful King Island will soon be underway thanks to \$300,000 from the Rudd government. This project is like just about all the projects that are being discussed on this side of the House, which are the result of election commitments and/or honour commitments made by the former government through their area consultative committees.

Last month, Minister Stephen Conroy signed off on the funding of this project, which I know the people of King Island have been waiting patiently for. This should be great news. The extension of digital television, which many take for granted—although I know my colleagues in rural and regional Australia do not—is an important part of keeping people on King Island in touch with the rest of Tasmania and the nation. They, like anyone else, deserve access to good television services. The funding commitment was made during the 2007 election, and working with the King Island council, the department is soon to make it a reality.

Because of the innovative approach of the council and its partners, it has taken some time to see this project reach the funding stage, but the aim was to see that the King Island people receive the best service possible. So I do apologise for the time taken. I think all of us in this House are aware of some of the frustrations that go with due process, but we are accountable for taxpayers' funds, and we have to do the right thing by them.

Those who can receive the signal can look forward to an excellent picture once the service is up and running. Unfortunately, due to the nature of digital transmissions and the challenging topography of this beautiful island, not everyone will be able to receive the new signal. The new service is not expected to impact on the analog service currently provided to the island—so that is a benefit—until the switch-over has to take place. The project will also see an improvement in the ABC radio reception on the island, for all those lovers of the ABC. I am sure this room is full of those supporters. The King Island Council will take responsibility for the Currie TV towers project and will operate the facility on a self-help basis and be responsible for any ongoing operation and maintenance costs.

I would now like to move on to another very significant area of expenditure—computers in education. It is somewhat derided by those on the other side but I bet none of them has been into the schools to tell them that they cannot have their computers. I am not a betting person but if I were I would be fairly confident of my loot. I am very pleased that north-west schools will share in the \$1,212,000 worth of computers as part of the second round of the Rudd government's national secondary school computer fund.

The successful secondary schools include School of Special Education North-West, North-West Christian School, Geneva Christian College, King Island District High School, Seabrook Christian School, Circular Head Christian School, Yolla District High School, Smithton High School, Parklands High School, Latrobe High School, Wynyard High School, Penguin High School, Devonport High School, Burnie High School, Reece High School, St Brendan Shaw College, Marist Regional College and, I am very pleased to note, both Hellyer College and The Don College. The Don College in particular is receiving 273 computers. I am very pleased because it is my old teaching stomping ground. Whilst I may, I congratulate The Don College and Hellyer College because they are now, with the introduction of the polytechnic campus and the academy campus, part of the post-compulsory education reforms in Tasmania. I wish them well with that, and I hope the computers that are readily available to them now will enhance their great teaching and learning programs. These computers come on the back of the 194 computers announced for north-west schools last year as part of round 1 of the National Secondary School Computer Fund. A further, supplementary round, 2.1, opened on 10 December, as we are aware, allowing eligible schools who have not applied under rounds 1 or 2 to apply if they do not have the ratio of one to two. I encourage any of my north-west schools who have not already applied to do it quickly in order to ensure their school reaches the national ratio level.

I now move into the area of health, where nobody can argue that spending is not very worthy or warranted. The people of Braddon and across Tasmania are set to benefit from a \$10 million injection to support patient transport in the state. The whole area of patient transport was constantly put to me before and during the election as a vital area of concern. This was not just about accessing appropriate forms of transport, assisting with the costs and having equipment to assist disabled and challenged patients using aircraft; it was also about having access to accommodation when required to travel to receive medical assistance and treatment. Many of the operators of various travel assistance community groups and regular emergency agencies also spoke of the urgent need to coordinate patient travel arrangements across the region and the state to achieve better and more efficient use of vehicles and drivers. Like many of my colleagues here, I was keen to lobby for these concerns, and I was very pleased that Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the current Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon,

listened to our case and were prepared to provide funding for these issues while working closely with the state government and other service providers. While people on the north-west coast would prefer to access all their medical and health services without leaving our immediate region, the reality is that sometimes we have to travel, and I hope that this package will assist them and their families in this.

The mix of funding and services, in cooperation with major reforms from the Tasmanian government, should improve the support for patients and their families. Under the initiative, our government will provide up to \$3 million to acquire additional patient transport vehicles in the north-west, the north and the south of the state; up to \$3.1 million to establish low-cost patient accommodation at Burnie in my electorate; up to \$90,000 for upgrades to the Spurr Wing accommodation complex in Launceston, where a number of our people have to go for specialist services; up to \$2.72 million to purchase new IT infrastructure and software to improve communication, coordination of patient transport and accommodation across the state; and up to \$300,000 to upgrade Queenstown airport, which will come into my electorate as we are having a redistribution.

Ms Jackson—How unfortunate!

transport and lifting equipment at Wynyard airport and up to \$770,000 to implement new telehealth initiatives to reduce the necessity for patients to travel to receive health care. That is a terrific package; \$10 million was promised in the election period, went through consultation, was committed and is now underway.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—They are very happy now! We are already working on this new relationship. That upgrade is to ensure safe patient transfers. Up to \$20,000 will be used to purchase appropriate patient

Another related area is that of aged care. Something that we must all be aware of is the growing need for this in our community. It should be at the forefront of our thinking and planning. In this respect, only a couple of weeks ago I was happy to announce the start of a project set to become a national aged-care leader, which has been recognised by the Minister for Ageing, Justine Elliot. The minister has offered funding for an innovative project being developed by north-west coast aged-care providers, in particular, for not-for-profit community aged care.

A few weeks ago, a group of aged-care providers from the region met to further discuss a study into ways to strengthen aged-care services and cooperation between providers in the region. The group had grown since the meeting with the minister last year and the series of gatherings that followed. I have been keen to support the group and assist them wherever I can and was only too happy to seek funding for a study of potential models. The challenges we have in the Cradle Coast region are no doubt shared by others throughout Australia, particularly regional Australia. The Rudd government is committed to ensuring high-quality, sustainable aged-care services.

I would like to acknowledge the work of Malcolm Johnstone from Eliza Purton in Ulverstone and Wendy Tadman from Yaraandoo at Somerset. As representatives of the group, they have been crucial to getting funding for the project. I was very pleased to announce that the minister was giving them funding to scope this project. Hopefully, I can share the results later on with members in this place and hopefully it will be applicable to other regional areas throughout Australia—particularly in the area of not-for-profit, community aged care. We cannot deny that this is a very difficult challenge and it is something that all members here are going to have to deal with.

Some significant funds associated with these appropriations will also flow to local government in my region as part of the federal government's injection of millions of dollars into regional and local infrastructure across Australia. Indeed, the earlier \$300 million Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program jointly announced by the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, and the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Anthony Albanese, has already seen a flow-on into my electorate. The Burnie City Council has received funding of \$235,000 to go towards the Les Clark bowls complex. The Circular Head Council has had \$277,000 committed to shared walkways in that part of the electorate. The Devonport City Council has received \$183,000, which is allocated to a skate park. The Waratah-Wynyard Council has had \$339,000 committed to walkways. I note that King Island has been given \$100,000, Latrobe has been given \$196,000 and the Central Coast Council has been given \$391,000 for projects under this scheme.

The money comes on top of the recent announcement of \$3.65 million going to the north-west councils in my electorate as part of the second instalment of the federal government's \$1.9 billion financial assistance grants, which we share with other members in this House. Time does not allow but there are many other projects that I could comment on in relation to the government's investment in infrastructure in my electorate. These are great stimulants and we look forward to sharing their benefits.