

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Economy

February 5, 2009

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (5:18 PM) —I take heart from the member for Hinkler, a man whom I respect a great deal and also a man with some good ideas. The member for Hinkler has regional Australia at his heart and always has had, and so do I and so do many on this side of the House. I take heart from the member for Hinkler because to this point I have been very worried. The member for Hinkler clearly supports our package and would make a great contribution by offering a number of projects for regional and rural Australia. You clearly support it and I am amazed that you did not vote with us last night. You know that this package is clearly designed to help rural and regional Australia, as it is to help urban Australia. What worried me first and foremost before I heard you is this. We have got a problem, we have got a challenge and we have got to do something about it. This package is designed to do that. The other worry I have is that, apart from the member for Hinkler, those on the other side are not going to do anything about supporting this package for rural and regional Australia as well as urban Australia.

Today I was pleased to hear through the COAG communique the unanimous support for this package from all states of Australia—including the Western Australian Liberal Premier—and also the representative of the Local Government Association of Australia. They clearly endorse our package. With this package goes a series of programs and outlays that we developed and have put into place since the budget of last year. The member for Hinkler talked about a rail project. I do not know the details of that but I am sure that if it has merit then it will see its way into Infrastructure Australia. We have a mechanism and a process for that to happen, not just for urban Australia but for rural and regional Australia.

I can tell the member for Hinkler—and he knows I come from a rural and regional area myself—that my community of Braddon sees hope in this package and sees the good intention of it. This package is designed to try and support and sustain jobs—not to lose them but to support and sustain them. It is part and parcel of a much wider program that began when we got into government. You only have to look at the programs, initiatives and commitments we made before the election that were in our budget of last year. They will roll out over the next three years, along with what we did in October and December and what we are doing here. They are part and parcel of a much broader program. It is about jobs; it is about supporting communities. This silly talk that we are ideologically driven to put this country into debt is silly and those opposite know it, and the Australian people are sick to death of the stupidity of these arguments.

This package may not be the bee's knees. There may be issues with it. No doubt the member for Hinkler, in his wisdom, will be able to assist with the projects for his region. He is going to benefit from this as well. He is a political representative, after all, and we expect him to do his part in promoting this and not oppose it. I say to him: do your bit for this, warts and all. Its intention is to work for both jobs and communities. We heard the shadow minister speak about infrastructure in schools as if it did not mean anything. Infrastructure is needed in our schools; we know that. In some states it is in appalling condition.

Also, this package will generate jobs. The Prime Minister, the Treasurer, our frontbench and the rest of this side have said, 'We are interested in this program more than anything'—and this goes for the COAG communique—'because we want to localise this.' It is all about local jobs and local people and supporting local infrastructure and local families. Just as it is in Braddon it will be in Hinkler, Cowper and other places in this nation.