



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

**APPROPRIATION (NATION BUILDING
AND JOBS) BILL (NO. 1) 2008-2009**

**APPROPRIATION (NATION BUILDING
AND JOBS) BILL (NO. 2) 2008-2009**

**HOUSEHOLD STIMULUS
PACKAGE BILL 2009**

**TAX BONUS FOR WORKING
AUSTRALIANS BILL 2009**

**TAX BONUS FOR WORKING
AUSTRALIANS (CONSEQUENTIAL
AMENDMENTS) BILL 2009**

**COMMONWEALTH INSCRIBED
STOCK AMENDMENT BILL 2009**

In Committee

SPEECH

Thursday, 12 February 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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Page 873
Questioner
Speaker Furner, Sen Mark

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Senator FURNER (Queensland) (11.58 am)—Firstly, I express my deepest sympathy for the atrocities we have seen of late in Victoria, with the overwhelming loss of property and human life. It has certainly touched me deeply to be in this chamber and be aware of that news. Equally, I express my concerns and sympathy for people in my own state of Queensland over the pain and hardship they are going through with the floods in North Queensland. Turning to the Nation Building and Jobs Plan, I think at this time more than ever—

Senator Abetz—I do apologise to Senator Furner for interrupting him but I was just wondering if he would be so kind as to indicate whether he is going to be giving us the benefit of a 15-minute speech. If he is, that would assist me in my own time management.

The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN (Senator Moore)—It is not usual for senators to tell how much time their speech will take.

Senator FURNER—At a time when we are facing a global economic crisis, here we are in this chamber debating a \$42 billion package that we need to put through urgently. This has been supported on many occasions by business leaders, economists, banks and those working in social welfare circles. This comes at a time when they are aware of the urgency of making sure this package is supported in this chamber. There has been an overwhelming case put for the Nation Building and Jobs Plan. There is a global recession. You do not need to be a rocket scientist to work out what is happening around our world. But those on the other side of the chamber seem oblivious to this. At a time when we need to support jobs and the economy of Australia they are opposing this bill. We are better placed than other countries to implement this proposal. We are fortunate to be aware of what we need to do in these circumstances—and that comes from the values of our party, the Labor Party—and what we need most. Those on the opposition side do not seem to have any understanding of what is best for jobs and working families in our nation.

The issue of the deficit has been raised. There is no doubt this is a global recession. It has wiped \$115 billion off the government's revenue, which has imposed this deficit. This is why we are implementing the proposal that we have put forward: to stimulate the economy, to stimulate growth, and to support and

encourage jobs and growth in the market. I am aware that amendments have been put before the chamber for consideration, and no doubt the amendments will be dealt with in due course. Once again, at a time when we need to look at the worst global recession that we have faced since the Great Depression, we make no apology for choosing to support Australian jobs.

I was fortunate enough just recently, Madam Temporary Chairman Moore, as you would be aware, to be a member of the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, which heard evidence on this package from various people who I would refer to as expert witnesses. In particular they gave evidence on what the effect of the package would be in regard to stimulating the economy and growth where we need it most—that is, in the housing industry. I will draw to the attention of the chamber some direct quotes from the committee *Hansard*. Frank Quinlan, the Executive Director of Catholic Social Services Australia, said this when talking about the housing initiatives in this bill in particular:

I would begin by saying that, when we sought feedback from our very broad membership over the last few days, the feedback was that this package is unequivocally good and unequivocally welcomed. It is well overdue.

What sort of message does that send? Once again it is sending the message that we need to stimulate the market by encouraging growth and supporting the housing sector and making sure that that flows on to support jobs for the people who construct those dwellings. He went on to say:

But the clear message from our broad membership was that the projects that were anticipated by this package are ready to go. There is enormous pent-up demand in the community and social housing area.

That evidence the committee received flies in the face of the sceptics, who ask, 'When is this package going to kick off?' or who say, 'Houses aren't ready to be built.' Houses are ready. There are projects ready to jump-start and prepared to go the moment this package is implemented. Mr Quinlan went on to say:

... from our perspective, there are some basic community needs that the government ought to meet—the need for

appropriate housing is one of them and the need for appropriate income support is another one.

He went on to say:

There has been an enormous push for a number of years to improve the level of housing stock, so the plans that people have are ready to go. I think 'shovel ready' is the jargon of the day ...

He makes no apology for his support. He had spoken to his directors, who in that instance had already acquired blocks of land. So it is not the case that people are not searching around for blocks to put these dwellings on. There are blocks of land ready and all we need is to have the package implemented and the approvals go through. Then we can start building these houses to supply dwellings for people who are homeless and people who are in need of housing in our country. So it is all about supplying that capital to make sure that these dwellings and services are provided.

At that same inquiry the committee heard from a Ms Helyar. She said:

In terms of employment, I think what is valuable in this package is that there is an opportunity particularly in the areas that have faced chronic and multiple disadvantage and high levels of unemployment. They are the very areas that need infrastructure built. So there is an opportunity there to combine providing training and support and employment services for people in those regions with the need for a workforce to deliver on the infrastructure. If we can capitalise on those opportunities, I think that will be a fantastic outcome from this measure.

Mr Quinlan went on to talk about where the people for these jobs would be coming from. He said it is not a case of needing to look at bringing in employees from overseas. He went on to indicate that these jobs would be filled by local residents, local people who are available and ready to be involved in the construction of these dwellings. He said:

One of the appeals that we see in the measures here in relation to housing and the measures in relation to schools is that the construction will be undertaken as part of the infrastructure measures at a much more local scale. So local people will have an opportunity to be engaged in those projects without some of the impacts that we have seen in other major infrastructure projects on rental costs and housing costs and we will see lasting assets for communities built.

So it is about supporting our local communities, local workers and working families that need support in these tough times. We cannot afford to go on delaying

much longer this process of ensuring that we support these people.

At the same inquiry we heard from Professor Disney. He said:

From a housing perspective, I think this is really an enormously important and very badly needed package. I have spoken to your committee before about the gravity of need, and I think it is widely accepted that it is huge. Even before the crisis, there were at least half a million households in unaffordable rental, and the number might well be twice as high as that now. So there is undoubtedly a major problem that has to be addressed.

Along with the construction of these houses in areas of need, there are further proposals in the Nation Building and Jobs Plan to have a balance between the economy and the environment. That is why there has been a proposal put forward in the bill to look at supplying insulation for ceilings and elsewhere in the construction of these homes and also for existing dwellings. It is to make sure people have the opportunity to be supplied with insulation and to generate jobs in this area as well, because we know there are approximately 32 businesses out there in the insulation business and the package, including a rebate of up to \$1,600 for the supply of insulation, would certainly generate jobs. From memory, in the same inquiry we heard evidence from the HIA. Their evidence was positive about the possibility for 85,000 jobs to be created in this area.

We hear the sceptics say, 'There is not going to be growth in housing, there is not going to be growth in the economy and there is not going to be growth in jobs.' But we have heard expert evidence at committee hearings that that is not the case. There is a case to be prosecuted here that this package will stimulate growth and employment, particularly in areas where it is needed. It amazes me that, while the opposition opposes the package, business leaders like the AiG, the ACCI and the Master Builders Association—and the list goes on and on—have given it the stamp of approval. They have indicated that they are on board. They have indicated that they want to see this package through. Yet those on the other side oppose it. It is about time they got on board and made sure that this is implemented.

The other day, during a break, I had the opportunity to talk to a young lady who works in the retail area. In fact, it was my daughter Sally. After the Christmas break there was an influx of sales in the boutique dress shop she works in. She is a manager at that dress shop. Certainly after the last stimulus package there were people coming in over the Christmas break to purchase clothing and so on, but when I rang my daughter yesterday she said things are starting to quieten down. It is clear that we need this stimulus package now.

We cannot afford to wait much longer. I do not know what the opposition's children do for jobs, but my children are in jobs in areas where stimulus is needed. I do not want to see my children or the children of working Australians on the unemployment list. It is about time we got on board and implemented this stimulus package.