

Extract from Hansard

Questions Without Notice 5 May 2009

STATE BUDGET — SUPPORT FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIANS

**338. Dr M.D. NAHAN to the Treasurer:**

While the previous government wallowed in \$10 billion of budget surpluses during the economic boom, the Liberal-National government has to make tough decisions to guide the state through the most difficult economic times seen in generations. What will the government do to ensure that it helps Western Australians in these difficult times, while also ensuring that we are ready for the next boom?

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL replied:**

I thank the member for Riverton for his question and for his ongoing and, I think, well-informed interest in economic matters in Western Australia. As I outlined in my previous answer, we face difficult challenges as we head into this year's budget. The financial environment in Western Australia has changed significantly.

I mentioned the \$3.5 billion in revenue that we have effectively lost since the midyear review, and we have to deal with that. I do not have the option of ramping up taxes and being the highest-taxing Treasurer in the history of state governments in Australia.

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** Over the forward estimates!

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition!

**Mr T.R. BUSWELL:** That is the legacy the former Treasurer left the government. In spite of year after year of multibillion dollar surpluses, the previous government left nothing to help the people of Western Australia through an economic downturn. It did not think to put a dollar aside for a rainy day; it just bolted out and spent the money, year after year. The government has had to make some tough decisions.

I will share with the member for Riverton the four budget objectives the government has set. The first is to protect jobs in Western Australia and to put a floor under the fall in the state's economy. To do that, we are looking at an investment program, partnerships with the commonwealth government; support for small businesses in Western Australia; and ways to make life easier for the private sector to operate in Western Australia.

The government does not want to see another Browse Basin happen in Western Australia; we do not want to see another Inpex in Western Australia, in which 3 000 to 5 000 jobs went to Darwin.

Secondly, we will address some of the underlying structural issues that the former government failed to deal with—issues around the approvals process, issues around red tape, issues around labour supply, and issues around labour quality—so that when this great state begins to grow again, as it surely will, we will not be inhibited by those constraints that members opposite failed to deal with when they were in government.

Thirdly, as we shape the budget, we will—as the Premier has indicated—deliver on our election commitments and we will improve the delivery of services to the families of Western Australia. Finally, notwithstanding the great challenges that our finances face, we will deliver all those things in a fiscally responsible manner that protects the underlying finances of this state as we move forward.