



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

ADJOURNMENT

Commonwealth Public Service

SPEECH

Thursday, 14 September 2017

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner	Responder
Speaker Brodtmann, Gai, MP	Question No.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (11:54): In *The Government and the People*, 1939-1941, Sir Paul Hasluck exposed the administrative heartache and headache caused by the dispersal of the Commonwealth Public Service, saying it 'wasted time and money, fretted men and hampered understanding, delayed decisions and led to conflict and duplication'. It was for this reason that the founder of the modern Liberal Party, Sir Robert Menzies, set about concentrating the Commonwealth Public Service here in Canberra, our nation's capital, deeming it better for the country as a whole.

What is so extraordinary is that those opposite, the coalition government, are hell-bent on unpicking that Menzies vision, that plan to concentrate the Commonwealth Public Service here in Canberra because to do so is the best thing for the country as a whole. We have this ludicrous decentralisation plan that the Deputy Leader of the Nationals has come up with, in which she purports to have a decentralisation plan that is well-executed and well-planned, with the benefits outweighing the cost.

If that is the case, we see from what has happened so far on this decentralisation plan that it has failed abysmally. We know this from what has happened with the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority and the impact this shameless and blatant pork-barrelling has had not just on families here in Canberra but also on the agricultural minister's own agency. As a result of this ridiculous pork-barrelling in moving the APVMA to Armidale, we have seen 50 of the agency's 175 staff move on, and that has had a significant impact on the approvals. The approvals for the agriculture industry have absolutely plummeted because there are no staff to make the approvals. The decades and decades of expertise in the agency has been completely lost as a result of this shameless pork-barrelling by the Deputy Prime Minister. All the years of expertise have been lost as a result of the ill-thought-out APVMA move.

We now have the Deputy Leader of the Nationals wanting to have a broader decentralisation policy to disguise the blatant and shameless pork-barrelling that is the APVMA move. Earlier this year she had senior-level public servants and ministers having to justify whether their portfolios should remain here in Canberra or whether parts could be decentralised. These justifications—remember the Menzies vision—were required by the end of August, with final decisions by December. We are now into September, and what has happened?

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 11:58 to 12:03

Ms BRODTMANN: As I was asking: what is happening? What is the government doing in terms of decentralisation? What are its plans? What are its plans for Canberra?

There are rumours all over Canberra at the moment about the Deputy Leader of the Nationals being in discussions with her own ranks about parts of government departments and services being moved to coalition held seats. We have seen reports this week of Comcare jobs that are apparently on the move to Geelong, which is in the member for Corangamite's seat. There are other rumours flying around all over this town about parts of government agencies being cherry-picked, despite the fact that the committee has not reported back yet on the decentralisation plan. Despite the fact that the inquiry is still ongoing, there are reports all over Canberra that parts of government agencies are being moved to coalition held seats. This is absolutely outrageous and flies in the face of the inquiry into the APVMA move by the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee and the recommendations made by the committee.

Deputy Speaker, I ask you: how many Canberra jobs have to be moved out of Canberra as a result of this government's outrageous decentralisation plans? Are the rumours true that deals have already been done, despite the fact that the committee was still assessing this issue, with coalition members and senators? I call on the government to come clean: What are your plans for decentralisation? What are your plans for Canberra? How

many jobs are you going to move out of Canberra? How much more of the Menzies vision and legacy are you going to decimate?