



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Unemployment

QUESTION

Tuesday, 8 July 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

QUESTION

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Speaker

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Unemployment

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Senator LAMBIE (Tasmania—Deputy Leader and Deputy Whip of the Palmer United Party in the Senate) (14:42): My question without notice is to the Leader of the Government in the Senate and Minister for Employment. Does the senator from Tasmania agree that his and his fellow Liberal Tasmanian parliamentary colleagues' incompetence is part of the reason that Tasmania is suffering from record unemployment, and will the senator agree to support my call for Tasmania to receive an extra \$5 billion of Commonwealth funds over four years so that a special economic zone can be created which will help business employ more workers and lower the unemployment rate in Tasmania?

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:43): As my fellow Tasmanian senator will understand, the Tasmanian economy finds itself in recession thanks to 16 years of state Labor governments, complemented by a Green-Labor government at the very end, and that was complemented further by a federal Labor government of six years, which was a Green-Labor government for the last three years. I would therefore say with respect to the honourable senator that visiting all the economic woes that Tasmania is currently suffering on the current federal government that has only been in power for nine months is not a proposition that I would endorse.

Having said that, I absolutely share with the senator a commitment to do the very best for our home state of Tasmania. That is why we had a special package for Tasmania at the last federal election. The package included infrastructure, including support for tourism infrastructure; the Dial Blythe irrigation scheme in the north-west of the state, from where Senator Lambie comes; and a Tasmanian jobs package to assist employers to put more Tasmanians into employment. So we have had a very comprehensive policy to assist our home state of Tasmania. In relation to the proposition to give an extra \$5,000 million to Tasmania over four years, it is not a proposition which we can entertain at this time given that, as we speak, we are borrowing \$1,000 million a month from overseas just to pay the interest on the existing borrowings.

Senator LAMBIE (Tasmania—Deputy Leader and Deputy Whip of the Palmer United Party in the Senate) (14:45): The minister in his answer has failed to properly address my request for his support for an extra \$5 billion of Commonwealth funding for Tasmania. Mr President, I ask a supplementary question. Does the minister agree that his Liberal government has made plans to borrow \$30 billion over the next five years so that he can give it away in poorly targeted foreign aid? Can the minister explain why the poor, the sick, the needy and the unemployed of other countries are more important to him than those in his own home state?

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:47): For the benefit of Senator Lambie, I table the coalition's economic growth plan for Tasmania, which was part of our election policy. Specifically in relation to foreign aid, we have said as a government that what you need in all these matters, economic and aid, is a sensible balance. The previous government put us on a trajectory in relation to foreign aid which was completely and utterly unsustainable and for what we believe to have been other purposes. Nevertheless, despite the economic woes in which Australia finds herself, we still believe that we do have an obligation to those countries less fortunate than our own to provide a degree of foreign aid support, which we will continue to provide. (*Time expired*)

Senator LAMBIE (Tasmania—Deputy Leader and Deputy Whip of the Palmer United Party in the Senate) (14:48): The minister has again failed to properly address my request for his support for an extra \$5 billion. Mr President, I ask a further supplementary question. Can the minister explain to the chamber why he is prepared to fight for record amounts of Australian taxpayers' money to be sent to other countries—some of which have

militaries 10 times the size of ours—while the sick, the needy, pensioners, parents, students, the unemployed and the battlers in his home state of Tasmania are being harmed by his government's— (*Time expired*)

Senator Wong: Mr President, on a matter of courtesy: it is the senator's first question, so maybe we could give her a little bit of leeway to finish the sentence.

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order, on my left! Your leader has made a request and I cannot fulfil that request until there is silence. Senator Lambie, do you have more to add to your question, which would be very brief?

Senator Lambie: Yes, Mr President. Thank you. Can the minister explain to the chamber why he is prepared to fight for record amounts of Australian taxpayers' money to be sent to other countries—some of which have militaries 10 times the size of ours—while the sick, the needy, pensioners, parents, students, the unemployed and the battlers in his home state of Tasmania are being harmed by his government's budget cutbacks?

The PRESIDENT: Before I call the minister, I advise the senator that the indulgence was granted for the first question but will not be granted for subsequent questions.

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania—Leader of the Government in the Senate, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Employment) (14:50): The budget that we set out just a few months ago is designed to bring about the restoration of the Australian economy, which in turn will provide the social dividends that we believe will flow. The simple fact is that, as we speak, we are borrowing \$1,000 million per month just to pay the interest on the existing loans. What we are doing in our budgetary strategy is to slow down that trajectory of deficit and debt that the Labor Party and Greens had us on, to ensure that we then get to a surplus situation. It is only when we are in surplus that we start paying down the debt. As a result, what we have been saying is that we do have to curtail our expenditure so we do not engage— (*Time expired*)