

Bill introduced on motion by Mr John Robertson, read a first time and printed.

Second Reading

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON (Blacktown—Leader of the Opposition) [10.03 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I introduce this bill to create a NSW Jobs Commission for one simple reason. The number one job of a Premier must be jobs. The Premier made a lot of promises at the last election, but two of these promises were absolutely fundamental. The first was his promise to make New South Wales number one again. The second, on the Sunday before the election in big flashing headlines, was Barry O'Farrell's promise to create 100,000 jobs in his first term. The people of New South Wales were led to believe that it was clear what they could expect from an O'Farrell Government. But in case there was any doubt the Premier put it to rest on 14 June 2011 when he said:

We are determined to not only end the slump but create an extra 100,000 jobs for people across the State.

By September the plan had become even more ambitious. On 4 September 2011 the *Sun-Herald* stated:

Barry O'Farrell will promise to create half a million jobs over the next decade, using his Government's landmark first budget to launch a plan to reignite the New South Wales economy.

We are now nearly 18 months into the O'Farrell Government. It is the Government's responsibility to guide and grow the economy and create a thriving environment for job creation in our State. But the trend lines are ominous. Last week the number of people unemployed in New South Wales increased for the fourth consecutive month. In July another 2,256 people joined that list. Let us step back. After 18 months as Premier how many jobs has he created? Has he created his promised 100,000, 50,000 or 25,000 jobs? Are there any takers for 10,000 jobs? The reality is so bleak, so far removed from the Coalition's extravagant promises that it should shock to the bone every member of this place. Today there are 5,861 fewer jobs in New South Wales than when the Premier took office.

The Premier promised to create 100,000 jobs in his first term and he is yet to create a single one. He has taken the State backwards and today he should be hiding in embarrassment. Under the O'Farrell Government a \$1.3 billion budget surplus has been turned into a string of deficits as far as the eye can see: worst of all, a string of deficits with not a single new job to show for it. In the March quarter the New South Wales economy contracted by 0.3 per cent even as the economy grew nationwide by 1.8 percent.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will be heard in silence.

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: New South Wales housing construction starts in the March quarter are the lowest since we started keeping records. Treasury is forecasting unemployment will rise further, to 5.5 per cent this financial year. Make no mistake: this is a

Premier whose lazy stewardship is tanking the New South Wales economy. After 16 years in Opposition he is out of inspiration after just 16 months in office. He is failing at the number one job of a Premier—to create jobs for the people of our State. Today the Labor Opposition offers the Premier some help with its proposal for an independent Jobs Commission for New South Wales.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Baulkham Hills will come to order.

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: The State economy is ailing—and an independent Jobs Commission is the game-changer that our State needs. Labor knows how to create jobs. We have credibility on this subject. The Labor Government created 100,000 jobs in our final year in office. And now today, from opposition, we are leading the debate again with a plan to drive jobs growth across the State. We want to match people's skills to new job opportunities in the marketplace and provide a helping hand to the regions and industries hit hard by mass layoffs. Under the bill I present today the NSW Jobs Commission would consist of the State's best and brightest economic minds. It would be led by a commission and no more than five other people appointed by the Premier: people with experience in areas such as business, agriculture, manufacturing, trade and investment, and research and development. Part of the current problem is that this State is led by a Premier who has no understanding of how the economy works. Outside of being a Liberal Party staffer, he has never had a real job. That is why the Premier is all at sea and in need of some help.

The NSW Jobs Commission would provide elite advice to government on how to create jobs. The Premier does not have a clue as to how to create jobs; this bill will provide him with the help he needs. The advice of the commission would be central to economic policy-making. The commission's role would be to systematically conduct inquiries into communities and industries that have been affected by job losses—the downsizing of a factory plant, the closure of a jail or the shutting down of a mine—and it would make recommendations to the Government as to how economic opportunities in struggling areas of New South Wales can be enhanced. The commission would identify skill shortages in industry sectors and regional communities and it would evaluate regional development funding initiatives. It would undertake regional impact studies, and it would be required to prepare an annual report for tabling in Parliament.

Let there be no doubt, the proposal for a NSW Jobs Commission is an idea whose time has come. Right now this country issues visas to locksmiths, panel beaters, surveyors and civil engineers from overseas when we could be growing these capacities in New South Wales and matching people's skills to the right location, right here. Why recruit a mining engineer from Germany when we could train one up in Muswellbrook? Why import a welder from Dubai when we could reskill one in Wyong? It is very easy to promise to create 100,000 jobs but you do not get there by magic; you get there by carefully considered policies. It requires a Premier with the will to get in there and have a go. The problem with the O'Farrell Government is that every signal it sends out is hostile to confidence and hostile to jobs. The Government has crashed public infrastructure spending by \$1.5 billion—an investment level that would have supported 15,000 jobs in New South Wales.

The Premier is slashing right across the public sector: 15,000 jobs; 300 firefighters and 300 police; 3,600 jobs going up in smoke in our hospital system; 2,400 set to be axed in schools and TAFE colleges; 900 jobs gone in the community services sector—hospital cleaners, classroom aides, child protection workers and train station staff—all told their positions are

gone. In the lead up to the budget leading economists were telling the Premier that slashing jobs would be bad for the State economy. Chris Richardson, chief economist at Deloitte Access Economics, warned against a sack and burn budget. AMP chief economist Shane Oliver said:

The danger is that it comes at a time when lots of private companies are cutting back as well. It adds to an air of negative sentiment.

The Government did not listen. The Premier has not just cut 15,000 jobs across frontline services, he has not just wound back the State's infrastructure spends and contributed to falling business confidence and retail turnover; he has done absolutely nothing while thousands of positions have been lost in construction, manufacturing, finance and other sectors. Let us look at the list: Norsk Hydro at Kurri Kurri, 150 jobs gone; Rio Tinto at Tomago, 150 jobs gone; Kell and Rigby, 470 jobs gone, including 400 contractors; HeyDay, Hastie Subsidiary, 600 jobs gone; Suncorp, 33 jobs gone; Reckitt Benckiser, 190 jobs gone; Bonds, 106 jobs gone; Caltex oil refinery, 630 jobs gone; and, most recently, Darrell Lea, 102 jobs gone. All those jobs have been lost on this Premier's watch.

The Premier should be sending a message to investors in the world that New South Wales is open for business. Instead, companies are being forced to shut up shop on his watch. There was a time when Premiers acted as energetic champions for their States. Premiers such as Bob Carr would walk over hot coals to stop jobs moving interstate or overseas. He would be scheduling crisis meetings and calling in chief executive officers. Yet this Premier has not lifted a finger. Last month, as hundreds of workers at Kurnell were being told their time was up, was Barry O'Farrell out there at the refinery with his sleeves rolled up? No, he was playing spin the bottle with Jackie O on a breakfast radio show—a performance that disgraced the office of Premier of New South Wales.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Keira and the member for Kiama will come to order. The Leader of the Opposition has the call. I remind Opposition members that they should remain silent whilst their leader is speaking.

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON: This Premier has time to suck up to a shock jock and his glamorous co-host but no time to meet with laid off workers at the Kurnell refinery or talk to them about ways the Government could help get them back on their feet.

As Premier, my values and approach will be different. I have looked into the faces of the unemployed. I have seen the hurt. I have felt the worry they feel about how they are going to put food on the table and support their family. Barry O'Farrell has let the people of New South Wales down. He has broken his promise to create 100,000 new jobs; instead he is sending the State broke without creating a single new job. He is in desperate need of help and fresh ideas. Labor has already announced it would scrap the Government's \$188 million Regional Relocation Grant Scheme and divert the money to a regional jobs plan. Today I propose the next step in our plan: spread jobs growth across New South Wales. The Premier may be struggling and need the best advice to achieve that outcome so he should support our

plan for a NSW Jobs Commission. The number one job of a Premier must be jobs.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Mike Baird and set down as an order of the day for a future day.