



Legislative Council

Budget Estimates And Related Papers

Hansard

Extract

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BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELATED PAPERS

Financial Year 1991-92

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The Hon. PATRICIA FORSYTHE [8.15]: "In a vision of the future I see the individual and his encouragement and recognition as the prime motive force for the building of a better world". Those words, spoken by Sir Robert Menzies some years before I was born but still relevant today, were my vision when I joined the Liberal Party as a school student in 1968. I was very proud then to stand up as a member of the Liberal Party; I am very proud to stand here today as one of its representatives, but willing, too, to serve all in New South Wales. As a student and former teacher of history I am conscious that this is the Fiftieth Parliament since the first tentative steps to democracy in New South Wales in 1823. The strength of the democratic process is underlined by the refining and evolving of the Legislative Council within the broader framework of parliamentary democracy in New South Wales since that time. I am proud to be a member of this Chamber, with its long and fine traditions, but I would be doing the citizens of New South Wales a disservice if I were to acquiesce in those traditions without accepting that we must always be receptive to reform - reform such as the referendum that was approved at the recent election for the reduction in the term of members. That reform should do much to raise community understanding of our role and reduce the cynicism that the community regrettably has of parliamentarians, especially those not frequently held to account. I believe, however, that I have joined a strong and dynamic Chamber. I thank all honourable members who have welcomed me and offered me assistance and advice as I have settled into my new role. In particular, I thank and acknowledge the staff of the Council, especially the Clerk, Deputy Clerk and of course Mr President.

As this is the Fiftieth Parliament there will be much temptation to look back - to reflect on past achievements. Yet, those of us elected in May 1991 can but pause momentarily. Our task must be to chart a course that will not only serve this State through the balance of the twentieth century but also will provide a strong foundation for the twenty-first century. In that context I turn first to education, for it is in that area more than any other that the key to the future is held. Governments have a duty to provide a strong system, relevant and accessible to all. I welcome the move back to selective schools within a system that recognises that excellence is about more than just good marks. Like my colleagues the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Minister for School Education and Youth Affairs, I am the product of the selective school system that operated so successfully in Newcastle until abolished in the 1970s. Until the abolition of the four selective high schools, Newcastle had one struggling independent school. In 1975 Newcastle Church of England Girls Grammar School had 145 pupils. Today, as Newcastle Grammar School, it has over 600 pupils.

In addition a second independent school has opened in the region at Maitland. Throughout the late 1970s and into the 1980s parents voted with their feet by moving students out of the government system in Newcastle because of a perception that the system did not meet the needs of their children. That more than anything else has convinced me that comprehensive, co-educational, fair average education is not what the community wants or needs. I welcome also the introduction of schools as centres of excellence as a means of introducing further diversity within the system. All pupils deserve the opportunity to develop their self-esteem through achievement. For many pupils that will not be in academic subjects. On the subject of education I want to pay a special tribute to the Minister for School Education and Youth Affairs, the Hon.

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Virginia Chadwick. I have known the Minister for about 20 years. In her maiden speech she paid tribute to the long lost tribe of Liberals in Newcastle. I am proud to have been one of the tribe. The Hon. Virginia Chadwick by her example has done much to assist me. For the Hon. Virginia there are never problems, only solutions, problems to be met and goals to achieve. I am pleased to be serving on her advisory committee and I look forward to many years of working with her.

My family and I took a decision five years ago to move to Sydney, a decision we have not regretted, perhaps because we are fortunate to live in the fine leafy area of the Ku-ring-gai municipality. Ku-ring-gai is far from the cutting edge of development in Sydney; yet throughout Sydney councils must play their part in providing a framework for Sydney for the next century. By 2006 Sydney will have a population that is estimated to grow to 4.5 million, and within that number one-person and two-person households will represent an even greater percentage of the total households than they do today, partly because of the ageing of our population. It will be environmental folly if all areas of Sydney do not grasp the nettle and promote positively medium-density housing development, particularly to ensure that our ageing population will have a true choice of housing within the areas that they have long called their homes, with their friends and their established lifestyles. Prior to my election I had the privilege to serve as executive officer to the then Minister for Local Government and Planning, the Hon. David Hay. In his promotion of medium-density housing he was a visionary and will be accorded an important place in history for the leadership he showed in that regard. He is a fine gentleman and a wonderful person with whom to work. I was saddened that after 32 years in local government his appointment as the Grants Commission chairman attracted criticism. I thank David and Jean for their friendship.

Though I am now a proud resident of Sydney, in this speech I must pay tribute to the city of

Newcastle, a city I will be proud to serve. I am especially proud that three members on this side of the House are Novocastrians by birth. I have mentioned the Hon. Virginia Chadwick, but I acknowledge the Leader of the Government in this House, the Hon. Ted Pickering. His father, the late Alf Pickering, and I were office-bearers of the Newcastle branch of the Liberal Party nearly 20 years ago. The Hon. Ted Pickering has been a good friend. He played an important role in my selection as a candidate. I thank him for that. I am pleased to be here today as part of such a strong team under his leadership. Newcastle is part of the richest valley in Australia. It has 8.5 per cent of the State's population. The valley as a whole, though it makes up only 3 per cent of the nation's population, produces 5 per cent of its gross domestic product. Coal, aluminium, steel and electricity are key industries that provide benefit for the whole State, indeed to all Australia. Newcastle has a fine university. I am especially proud of its medical faculty and recall that early in the 1970s I persuaded the Liberal Party in Newcastle to champion the cause for the establishment of that faculty. On that occasion groups from across the city, for example the Chamber of Commerce, took up the cause as well.

That success spurred us on to other endeavours, such as lobbying for a taxation office in Newcastle in the 1980s. When groups in the city come together for common goals the city is a formidable force, the spirit perhaps that has been most evident in the time since the earthquake. Yet, at the same time, it is a city easily divided - there is a

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them and us mentality, perhaps as the result of long periods of industrial unrest. The sixties when I joined the Liberal Party were characterised by unrest, but often the result of internal union disputes. Demarcation issues especially marred the progress of the State Dockyard, the wharves and the steel industry. I was saddened by the knowledge that only this year a demarcation dispute impacted on the work of Forjacs, a firm associated with ship repairs.

In my vision for the future I want to see an outlook not of them and us but a shared outlook, where the enormous economic potential of the Hunter is realised. I welcome the move to enterprise agreements as a means of overcoming the inter-union disputes and reducing management-worker conflict. Earlier this year the Hunter Economic Development Council outlined an economic strategy for the region for the next 20 years. It identified 30 industries with strong private business opportunities. Clearly those opportunities will not be developed without infrastructure upgrading, and for this governments State and Federal over many years will have to be involved. I look forward to being an ambassador for the city. Past government neglect and political complacency must end if the region is not only to achieve its potential but also to ensure a richer New South Wales and Australia. Newcastle has given me much.

To my parents, Jack and Peg Wingrove, my parents-in-law, Colin and Barbara Forsythe, my brother and his family and the Forsythe family, I thank you all for the support and encouragement. The Wingrove and Forsythe families have given much to the city of Newcastle. I am proud to carry on that tradition. To my twin sister, Anne Finlay, I say thank you for the friendship and the friendly competition. Without that sense of rivalry perhaps my ambitions would have been lesser. To all the members of the Liberal Party in the region, but especially Ivor Davies, Val Samuels and Colleen Hodges, I say keep up the good fight; many challenges are still to be met.

In a speech as broad as the one I am able to give today I would like to cover many areas, but time will permit only a passing reference. I am proud to be Liberal because of its strength of belief in the individual: individual enterprise and individual freedom. In that context I am saddened that within our society many individuals do not share the advantages that my children and I enjoy. In this last decade of the twentieth century the problems of Aboriginal infant mortality, Aboriginal life expectancy and Aboriginal health must be addressed. The tyranny of distance is still a real issue to be addressed. Modern communication methods provide links between communities, but without viable industries towns will not survive. The pressure of development along the coast will itself be addressed only if a real choice exists for people as to where they live and where they work. In this Chamber with 15 women members I know that issues facing women will not lack for attention. In that context then I hope we can work together to address in particular issues of violence against women and the recognition of the value of many so-called women's jobs. Equal pay for jobs of equal value must be achieved.

Finally, in this context, the community as a whole must come to grips with the long-term results of high youth unemployment. We cannot see our youth wasted because of the economic decisions of this generation. In this context I welcome the Budget brought down yesterday as a genuine attempt to come to grips with the problems our community faces. I wish to conclude with a few more acknowledgments. I thank all

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members in this Chamber for their welcome and advice. Especially, I thank my Whip, the Hon. J. H. Jobling, and my good friend, the Hon. J. P. Hannaford, both of whom gave me plenty of encouragement in recent years. I thank others in the Liberal Party - Michael Photios, M.P., Marise Payne, Robyn Kerr, Liz Story, Betty Grant and Betty Davy - for the encouragement and support they have given me. Saving the very best for last, I place on the record my thanks to my family - my husband David and my children Kate and Jonathan, without whose total support, encouragement and love I would not be doing this. I look forward to a long and interesting period in this Chamber. I hope to contribute to the vitality of this place - a vitality where the energy is the energy of light, not the energy of heat.