



Legislative Council

Budget Estimates And Related Papers

12/11/91

Hansard

Extract

The Hon. J. F. RYAN [8.15]:

"Ah Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." But the Lord said to me, you will go to every one I send you, and what ever I command you, you shall speak,

Do not be afraid of them,

for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.

I particularly wanted the first words I spoke on to the official record at the start of my public life to be a verse of scripture, firstly, to reflect the respect I have for Holy Writ and, secondly, because the scripture expresses my highest hopes and aspirations. I am not a preacher, and the message is not for anyone here or anywhere else. It is for me. Just at this moment, as I undergo the tribal ritual of a maiden speech, I can do with encouragement urging me not to be afraid. I did not discover until I was elected to the Legislative Council that this place is the source of the elixir of life. Until 1988 I worked as a school teacher. I discovered that perceptions of age in this place are very different from those in the school environment. When I started teaching at the age of 24 years, my younger clients tended to look upon me with the attitude that they hoped to be dead by the time they reached my degenerated condition. And it only got worse. Over time I became married, mortgaged and middle aged.

Since I arrived here, I have not stopped hearing comments about how young I am supposed to be. One honourable member even suggested to me that I was a bit young to be in this House and that there should be a provision in the Constitution which prevented people from becoming members of the Legislative Council until they had reached the age of 40. Mr President, people can give up the search for the legendary fountain of youth. The Legislative Council is the only place on earth that I know of where you can be an embattled 30-something and be made to feel positively juvenile.

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There is space in this House for politicians a great deal younger than I am. There are eight members younger than I in the other place. Younger members of Parliament have proven that they can make important contributions to governing this State. The current Premier entered Parliament at the age of 34; he was Leader of the Opposition at 36; and he became Premier only a few weeks before his forty-first birthday, making him the State's youngest ever leader. In case honourable members opposite feel left out, the current Leader of the Opposition was a Minister of the Crown before he turned 40.

Honourable members, I am proud to be a part of a new Government that is led by a young leader who has been bold enough to try new ideas. The Government has paid due regard to the needs and aspirations of this State's younger generation. Most importantly, at a time when too many young people have lost interest in politics, it is vital that young people be in the Parliament because they have a stake in the decisions we are making. Our decisions about health, welfare and education will play a role in how many of them start life. Our management of the physical environment will determine their inheritance. The State debt is a mortgage on their future.

Unfortunately, our opponents are too conservative to appreciate new ideas. They show unvarnished prejudice against performing old tasks in a different way, even if new ways prove to be more effective. I have heard them urging us to keep old assets long after they have outlived their usefulness in their current form. They would have us keep scarce resources, such as the health and education system, locked up where they are rather than move them to locations where there is a greater need. They would die in a ditch to defend pointless work practices because they represent hard-won gains out of previous conflict. Nothing better illustrates this tension between old and new than the recent discussion which surrounded the passage of our Industrial Relations Bill. Our opponents defended the old system because it helped maintain a bottom line of minimum wages and conditions. They failed to see that the new arrangements draw a line above the current system and promote the achievement of better wages and conditions by allowing the workplace to be more flexible and productive.

I live in Campbelltown. I follow other honourable members of this House who have represented the Liberal Party, with a special interest in southwestern Sydney, such as the Hon. Greg Percival and the Hon. Frank Calabro. I am proud to be a resident of the greater west of Sydney. It is one of the most exciting growth areas of this State. It has a population of over 1.4 million people, making it bigger than the cities of Brisbane and Adelaide and the Australian Capital Territory or the State of Tasmania. Our population is said to be growing at the rate of 17 per cent a year. Reasonable land prices, the area's potential as a labour supply, together with proximity to the city, have given western Sydney the potential to be the place where this State will make its break from the recession.

Most of the population of southwestern Sydney is young and most people are like me in that they have moved there fairly recently. Nevertheless, it is an area which has a rich historical heritage, which links it to the very birth of this State. The city of Liverpool is one of the towns established by the expansive vision of Governor Lachlan Macquarie. To the south lies the town of Camden, the virtual birthplace of this nation's wealth. Early citizens of the southwest have included the emancipist Dr William Redfern, who gave the town of Campbelltown its name, and the Macarthur family, whose ghosts inhabit this building and whose names are inescapably associated with the history of this Chamber of the New South Wales Parliament. Campbelltown was the place where authority finally caught up with the wild colonial boy, old Jack Donahoe, and it is the final resting place of James Ruse, who grew the State's first crop of wheat.

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I came into this Chamber to fight for this part of New South Wales from the Government benches, but I am pleased to say that little fighting has been necessary. The Government has boldly recognised the needs of this area and is providing for them as best as the present perilous state of the national economy will allow. The State Government has been able to do this by managing resources boldly, cutting waste and moving resources to where they are needed most. There could be no better demonstration of how this has been achieved for the benefit of western Sydney residents than recent decisions which have been taken in the health portfolio.

This year the budget of the South Western Area Health Service has been increased by \$58 million - a real increase of nearly 11 per cent. This is an outstanding achievement at a time when the health budget has been limited by the current economic circumstances to a position of only a slight growth in real terms during this year. This funding is a direct result of the application of progressive and clever management on the part of the Government. The Government has made additional resources available to growth areas of the State, like the west, by re-allocating funds from the inner city where the population is falling. I unreservedly support the Government's program to re-allocate resources to growth areas and I condemn the deceitful, misguided and self-interested campaign which has been waged against it. Forty-one thousand patients who live in the area served by the South Western Area Health Service have had to leave that area and travel vast distances for considerable time to access basic services such as orthopaedic and cancer treatments. We have come up against the protests of people complaining that they would have to travel for a further 10 minutes. The facts speak for themselves. In the inner city there are more than twice the number of beds per person compared with the west of Sydney. If changes were not made, it would not have been possible to provide the \$12 million which will be spent this year at Liverpool Hospital to upgrade it to teaching hospital status.

The other important manner in which important clinical services have been enhanced is by productivity savings. This program has also been misrepresented and distorted to create the impression that services are being cut. Nothing could be further from the truth. Productivity savings are simply good management. No organisation can claim to be 100 per cent efficient. All the Government has done is ask area health services to identify areas of inefficiency, and the dollars saved have been allocated to providing other services. In most cases this has involved making savings in administration and applying the savings to improved clinical services. This week I took the trouble to speak with Mr Ken Brown, the Chief Executive Officer of the South Western Area Health Service, to ask him how this policy had been applied to hospitals at Bankstown, Liverpool, Fairfield, Campbelltown and Camden. He supplied me with details as to how savings had been made and how the money saved was to be spent. Mr President, I could only be impressed.

Mr Brown told me that the South Western Area Health Service had been set a savings target of \$3.5 million for this year. They found \$1.5 million of their target for savings by implementing a more efficient cleaning roster. Mr Brown also told me that not only was the new cleaning service schedule cheaper, but it was also a much better service. Another \$125,000 was saved on advertising costs; \$333,000 was saved by improved stock control; \$895,000 came from reductions in administrative staffing levels, and \$50,000 from improved energy management. Not one of these improvements could have been made without the application of better management. From this money \$0.5 million has been applied to improving orthopaedic and eye surgery services at Liverpool Hospital; a further \$200,000 has been made available for services to cancer patients; a diabetic clinic has been opened at Fairfield District Hospital; a child development unit has been opened at Campbelltown Hospital; over \$300,000 will be spent on palliative care services at Camden; \$0.5 million on a new computer system and the appointment of a professor of psychology, and the list goes on. Every cent which has been saved has been spent on providing much needed clinical services. They represent the very essence of what the Greiner Government means by putting people first by managing better.

It is a demonstrable fact that the Greiner Government has a far greater commitment to the health needs of western Sydney than any Labor Government which came before it. Honourable members on both sides of the House will remember the glossy brochure called *Health 2000*, which Premier Wran launched in 1986. Premier Wran claimed that *Health 2000* was "the planned program to upgrade the State's Health Services to the end of the Century". There is no mention in *Health 2000* of upgrading either the Liverpool Hospital or the Nepean Hospital to teaching hospital status. If Labor were still in office, residents where I live would still be waiting for these services well after the year 2000. Similar comparisons could be made between the Government's approach to road building and that of our opponents. This year the total spending on roads will be \$1,327 million compared with the \$885 million spent in the last year of the former Labor Government. This year the Greiner Government will spend \$40 million on roads in western and southwestern Sydney. In 1988 Laurie Brereton could find only \$10 million.

But it is not just in the amount of spending where we differ from the former Government. The last Government hung on to an outmoded policy of relying heavily on borrowings to fund major roadworks. The financial consequences of its policies were disastrous. They left future generations to cope with a debt of \$1.3 billion. In the last year the Labor Party was in office interest payments swallowed \$1 out of every \$8 which were available to be spent on roads. To put this another way, one half of the cost of a major expressway project disappeared in dead money every year. For the third year in succession this Government has funded a bigger road budget than its predecessor, with no new global borrowings. This has been achieved because this Government was prepared to implement new ways of funding the road projects. First, we allocated all petrol taxes to road funding. Second, we introduced the 3 x 3 road funding program. And, finally, we have adopted a user pays policy to bring forward the construction of two new tollways. I welcome and strongly endorse the policy of paying for today's projects with today's money. I see no justification whatever for passing on a debt to our children for roads we want to build now.

Yet despite record growth in road spending, despite record spending on roads in western Sydney, our opponents persist in running a deceitful campaign against the F4 and the F5 tollways. Their campaign is deceitful because Labor cannot deliver on its promise to fund the tollways from the State Budget. They could do so only by either stringing out the construction of the roads over many years or diving back into the debt trap to fund these projects with huge borrowings. Honourable members, I ask you to consider the fact that the cost of these two projects amounts to a sum of nearly \$600 million. That amount is more than even this Government has allocated to building new roads this year. There is no choice. Either they are built as tollways or they will have to wait their turn on the roads budget where there is no reason to expect that they would be built before the end of this century.

Labor politicians obviously would rather score cheap points, even at the expense of depriving their traditional constituents of many benefits which these tollways will bring to western and southwestern Sydney. The tollways

will cut 15 minutes' and sometimes 50 minutes' journey time off trips into the city. By allowing vehicles to maintain a constant speed they will cut fuel consumption and reduce exhaust emissions. Everyone knows that western Sydney has catastrophic problems with its air quality. The major cause of the problem is car exhaust fumes. The tollways will save commercial vehicles time, fuel, money and accidents. This will more than offset the cost of the proposed tolls. Evidently some honourable members opposite believe that ordinary taxpayers should foot the bill for a road which will save businesses like trucking companies a fortune. Tollways will link commercial activity in western Sydney with other important business centres. They will generate much needed employment opportunities for people in Sydney's west and probably save many of them from the pointless drudgery of commuting into the city.

But, even more important, constructing these roads is not only financially responsible and good for the western suburbs of Sydney; the policy is also environmentally responsible. If these roads were to be upgraded to expressways without a toll, the volume of traffic on them would soon rise to meet the capacity of the available roads. They would attract commuters away from excellent rail links, such as the eastern suburbs railway, back into their private cars and back to polluting the environment. A user-pays policy will ensure that people think twice before they make a journey in a motor car. This is an essential trend that we have to foster in modern cities. It must not be forgotten that the tollways will not replace existing roads. They are extra roads. Motorists who want to avoid paying the toll will still be able to use existing roads. Yet even these drivers will benefit cost free from reduced travelling times, because these roads will not be congested with commercial traffic which has transferred to the tollways. Tollways are the way of the future. Anyone who opposes them is simply standing in the way of progress. They represent a modern road management approach in which everyone wins something.

The Greiner Government has applied the same sound management approach to providing transport services. Not a single member in this House could not testify to the fact that train services have been vastly improved since the Greiner Government came to office. When we came into office our rail system was dirty, inefficient and covered in graffiti. Its capital assets were running down. Work practices, dating back to the age of steam, were entrenched into the system and our railways were losing \$2 million a day. The Minister for Transport has to be commended for his outstanding achievement in cutting waste and improving services, which has continued in this year's Budget. Over 70 railway stations have been fully renovated. New Tangaras have just about completely replaced the red rattler carriages, well in advance of the expected schedule originally put forward by the former Government. Staff productivity has risen by 44.5 per cent and staffing levels have fallen by just under 30 per cent. Trains are cleaner, more comfortable, and their on-time running now rivals standards achieved by the best railway systems in the world.

All this has been achieved at a much reduced cost to the taxpayer. In the next financial year the operating costs of the State Rail Authority will be \$403 million less than they were when this Government came to office. This has allowed the Government to find resources to fund massive improvements to the rail service and to cut the losses of the State Rail Authority by close to \$1 million a day. It has also provided the Government with over \$277 million more to spend on providing other services such as hospitals, schools and police. I have heard it said on a number of occasions in this Chamber and in other places that the Greiner Government is obsessed with money. It is not obsessed with money. It understands how much it costs ordinary taxpayers to provide the Government with funds and it is obsessed with making sure that they get value for

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their tax dollar. The Greiner Government was elected with a mandate to make a change for the better. By any objective assessment the Government has succeeded in making enormous changes for the better management of this State and for better services which are provided to its citizens. I look forward to contributing to the introduction of further changes to State administration which will make government more efficient, more accountable and more responsive to the needs of my fellow citizens.

I have been fortunate enough outside the Parliament to have had the opportunity to contribute to government policy. One matter in which I take great pride is in helping to formulate this Government's response to the needs of children with learning difficulties. One of my greatest frustrations as a school teacher, particularly a high school teacher, was to watch children pass through our school system and leave it while still afflicted by severe learning difficulties. I regularly had the experience of encountering young people in year 10 about to leave school who were unable to read and unable to write much more than their names. In many cases this tragedy can be avoided and many future problems solved by early detection of difficulties such as hearing loss, lack of fine motor skills, intellectual disorders or behavioural problems. Early detection allows for early treatment with individual programs. In most cases the problems can be overcome before other more serious problems emerge. I look forward to the time when these facilities will be sufficient so that no child starts school without being tested for potential learning difficulties, and so that special education programs are made available to all children who need them. It is every child's right to start school with a fair chance of achieving success. As a member of Parliament I look forward to making many more contributions like this towards the improvement of services to children and young people in this State.

I welcome the recent introduction of reforms to the procedures of the House and the Parliament, such as estimates committees. As a mere member of the House I found them extremely informative in bringing me up to speed with how the State's finances were being managed. I overheard one Minister applaud the fact that he had never been so well briefed on his own budget as a result of being briefed in preparation for committee hearings. I also thank the Leader of this House for allowing me the opportunity to participate in the recent Joint Select Committee on Gun Law Reform. It was a unique achievement which has been referred to by my colleague the Hon. Jennifer Gardiner, whom I congratulate on her maiden speech. It brought together a wide cross-section of the Parliament and it made us reach consensus on such an important matter, such a contentious issue, in such a short time. It showed the value of consultation as a means of solving difficult problems. I look forward to seeing that process repeated in response to other matters in the future. The key to its success was the willingness of different members to listen to one another and to put aside crass political point-scoring. All members of that committee should be commended for the professional manner in which they participated.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge gratefully and to thank many people who encouraged me and helped me to become a member of this House. I owe a great deal to my old friends who formed part of the former conference at Earlwood - people like Noel Hadjimichael, Don Harwin, Ros Riley and Kerry Morris who taught me the ropes and helped me

in my first attempt to enter the New South Wales Parliament. I thank many current members of this House - the Hon. Dr Marlene Goldsmith, the Hon. John Hannaford, the Hon. Dr Brian Pezzutti and the Hon. John Jobling who have provided me with advice drawn from their own experience in seeking election to this House. It is no secret to honourable members that I represent yet another contribution to this House by the Hon. Ted Pickering. I will never forget the first time I met the Hon. Ted Pickering.

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It was in 1987, just before my first attempt to seek Liberal Party preselection for the Legislative Council team. I was brought into the office of the Hon. Ted Pickering by the Hon. John Hannaford for what I was told would be a few drinks. Boy, was I wrong! I left the meeting after receiving one of the most harsh verbal pizzlings that I have ever received in my political life. But I am grateful for every word. Ted may have a habit of coming to the point quickly, but his advice on how to get support in a preselection was invaluable, and I used every bit of it over the next four years. One of the most enduring and outstanding contributions of the Hon. Ted Pickering is the way in which he has encouraged young people in the Liberal Party to seek parliamentary office. I am grateful and honoured to have been one of the people he saw fit to encourage.

I acknowledge also the Liberals who fight for our cause in the western suburbs of Sydney. One does not have to be a political scientist to realise that we are not exactly in the majority in that part of Sydney. I promise not to let you down and I look forward to being joined by more of you in the future. I am thankful for the efforts of Alderman Jim Merry, Alderman Tom Glavich, Shirley Photios, Gloria Arora and Alderman Tony Pascale, who even tonight are supporting me in the gallery. It has been said by one wit that behind every successful man there is an astonished mother-in-law. I am not sure what truth this saying has in my case, but I do know how much I owe my parents and my parents-in-law for their help and support during the past eight years. I would not have made it without you. In fact, without your help on odd occasions I might have been ineligible, because bankrupts cannot be elected to Parliament.

Finally, I am so very grateful for the enormous love and support of my wife Alexandra and my two wonderful children Elizabeth and Nicholas. Shakespeare said that, "There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd". I presume that is true, but I never cease to be amazed at the way my family all patiently endure the many impositions which politics places on family life, and continue to support me with abundant love and encouragement. Elizabeth and Nicholas, I know you do not yet understand what Daddy does in "Parmalent" but I promise to always think of your best interests and those of other young people like you in whatever I do in this place. I thank also all members from both sides of the House for the manner in which they have welcomed me to this House. I thank you all also for extending the traditional courtesies associated with my maiden speech this evening. I tried hard to think of an inspiring and lofty literary quote to conclude upon, but try as I might I could not think of one that suitably expressed my personality. It seemed best for a person with my heritage to conclude with the Irish blessing which states, "May I have the hindsight to see what came before me, may I have the foresight to see that which is in front of me and may I have the insight to see when I have gone too far".