



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

COMMITTEES

**State Government Financial
Management Committee**

Report

SPEECH

Thursday, 25 September 2008

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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Questioner
Speaker Polley, Sen Helen

Source Senate
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Senator POLLEY (Tasmania) (6.12 pm)—From the comments this evening by my colleague across the chamber and former chair of the Senate Select Committee on State Government Financial Management, I think he has reinforced once again my view and the view of my colleagues on that committee that this was a shameless political exercise. This committee was established to have a go at all the state Labor governments at that time. If the opposition had been serious about the undertaking of this committee, they would have referred it to the appropriate standing committee rather than setting up a select committee, which was purely a very political exercise. The comments by the senator opposite demonstrate that very clearly again tonight.

If the select committee was not politically motivated and driven as a ‘let’s bash the Labor states’ then why was there no acknowledgement given in the report or at any of the hearings of where there was very clear, good financial management by the Labor state governments? In particular, I refer to my own experience with the Tasmanian Labor state government. They managed to turn the budget around from what was a very, very shameful exercise by the previous Liberal government in the way that they ran the Tasmanian state government into enormous debt. If this was not a political exercise then that state government, at the very least, would have been acknowledged. What disappoints me was that Liberal senators from Tasmania were in fact members of that politically established select committee. Shame on Senator Bushby in particular.

It never ceases to amaze me that, even though the senators on the other side are now in opposition, they still do not learn. They are totally out of touch with the community. Once again the former chair of that committee was talking state income tax changes. What they want to do is, yet again, further complicate the taxation system for the Australian community. It just demonstrates how out of touch they still are.

I do hope people read this report, in particular the minority report submitted by government senators. In our minority report we pointed out that the previous Howard government spent very little on new infrastructure. We heard the diatribe of the senator opposite in relation to what is happening with the ports in Queensland, but at no time did he enlighten us as

to what he was doing as part of the former Howard government. This is in stark contrast, might I say, to the Rudd Labor government and the creation of the new body, Infrastructure Australia. With this body a proper mechanism has been created to deal with infrastructure requirements in a measured and planned manner rather than for electoral and political gain. It is another forward-thinking initiative of the Rudd Labor government.

Australia’s infrastructure needs were neglected for 11½ years under the previous Howard government. It is now time to fix that. Of course, given that Infrastructure Australia and the new Building Australia Fund will have a program of infrastructure projects to work on, the fifth recommendation of the majority report regarding state infrastructure spending is redundant. All in all this politically motivated report shows that the Liberals are still blaming everyone else but not taking any responsibility themselves. They are in the blame-shifting mode. They cannot get with the program and acknowledge their own shortcomings when they were in government.

The opposition need to understand that it is time to accept responsibility for the neglect of the Howard government over the previous 11½ years. Senator Macdonald also touched on the public health system. How can anyone stand on the opposition side and talk about health? If we want to talk about health, I could be here for the next three hours talking about the neglect of the Howard government and how they pulled all the money out of the public health system. That is why we have so many long waiting lists around the country. It took a Labor government to inject funds to relieve those waiting lists. Money torn out of public hospitals, the lack of investment in infrastructure—all this occurred under the previous Howard government.

Senator Abetz interjecting—

Senator POLLEY—I accept the interjections of Senator Abetz because he, of all people, ought to know the grief that his government caused to the Tasmanian community by ripping that money out of the health system. In the minority report government senators clearly set out the problems with this report and the inconsistencies of a number of the recommendations.

Debate (on motion by **Senator Parry**) adjourned.