



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**Main Committee**

**APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 3) 2009-2010**

**APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 4) 2009-2010**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 10 February 2010**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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| <b>Questioner</b>                       | <b>Responder</b>    |
| <b>Speaker</b> Rishworth, Amanda, MP    | <b>Question No.</b> |

**Ms RISHWORTH** (Kingston) (11.11 am)—I rise today to support the Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2009-2010 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2009-2010. These two bills provide timely funding for numerous very successful government programs, schemes and funds, with the appropriations being sought amounting to a little over \$2 billion. A lot of these projects have been part of the federal government's successful stimulus plan. Our nation-building plan has been very successful and widely appreciated, certainly in my electorate of Kingston.

Only two weeks ago I went with the Minister for Housing to visit some of the projects that are happening on the ground in the area of social housing. We visited 16 houses being instructed in Hackham—a lovely suburb—and these houses are well on their way. I visited this location with the minister only six months before, and at that time it was an empty block waiting for construction. At that time, we met with the company organising the construction of these houses. Six months later, we are seeing houses having their kitchens put in, the plastering done, the insulation put in and very soon will be ready for the first tenants to move in. This is an incredibly successful scheme not only because it has provided much-needed housing in my local area but also because it has provided an economic stimulus and has supported jobs.

When I visited there six months ago, we discussed with the project managers, Quattro, that we wanted to ensure that local people were employed. So I was very pleased to have a visit from the Minister for Employment Participation, Senator Mark Arbib. He came down and had a 'keep Kingston working' forum. As a result of this, we saw on the worksite, only a few weeks ago, local tradespeople—local kitchen makers from Lonsdale, local tradies from Aldinga—all working on this project. They were all getting work because of the government stimulus strategy. So I think that was an exciting project and I thank the Minister for Housing for attending that.

While the minister was in the electorate of Kingston, we also visited Southern Junction Community Services, a very reputable non-government organisation providing housing to people most in need. I do note that Appropriation Bill No. 3 provides an additional close to \$20 million to the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs for payments under the Rental Affordability Scheme. The Rental Affordability Scheme is a particularly important scheme for electorates such as Kingston where we are seeing that the affordability of rent—and I have spoken about this many times in the parliament—is becoming out of reach. We do know that when the cost of rent or repayments exceeds 30 per cent of someone's income they are under housing stress. I meet people day after day in my electorate who do feel housing stress, so I was very pleased that, when the Minister for Housing was down, we were able to visit Southern Junction Community Services in an area where the scheme will deliver 83 new affordable rental homes in Adelaide's southern suburbs by 2011. We met with Graham Brown and his board of Southern Junction Community Services and we were able to discuss exactly how this was going to impact on people within our community, particularly looking at people under housing stress whether they be families or young people in southern Adelaide.

These houses will have a significant impact and deliver some great outcomes. The 83 homes being built will include a mix of studio apartments, two- and three-bedroom townhouses and three-bedroom houses. This is really important because in the southern suburbs of Adelaide we have often seen that housing availability has not always accommodated the different types of households looking for it. In some areas there is not enough housing for individuals—single person houses—and in other places there is not enough housing for families. These houses are really important and they will be rented out at at least 20 per cent below the market price to tenants who meet eligibility criteria.

The financial pressure caused by high rental prices is something which is hurting low- and moderate-income earners around Australia. The additional funding proposed in this bill is required due to the larger than expected number of charities and non-government organisations, such as Southern Junction Community Services, seeking to participate in the scheme. The previous government really did nothing when it came to housing affordability. I know that this was an increasing issue in my local electorate. Certainly, people in my electorate have welcomed the very practical and positive things that this government has done. There is the National Rental Affordability

Scheme, which I have mentioned, and also the social housing under the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan. These two things are really making a difference on the ground in Kingston.

Appropriation Bill No. 3 also proposes to bring forward \$290 million from 2011-12 for the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts to meet the increase in demand for the Home Insulation Program which is, once again, part of our practical solution to dealing with the financial crisis. This program offers up to \$1,200 in ceiling insulation to owner-occupiers, landlords and tenants. Having opened on 1 July 2009, this has been an incredibly popular program that many people have taken up. To illustrate how popular it has been, as at November last year take-up of the government's Energy Efficient Homes package saw ceiling insulation provided for over 600,000 Australian households and around another 100,000 households took up the solar hot water package. This compares to the previous government where only 4,000 people took up the solar hot water rebate.

This government has seen where there is a need. It has looked at it in a time where we needed to actually do something that not only stimulated jobs and interest in the short term but also in the long term. These programs will help many people to cut their electricity bills. I think that this is really important. We have seen in South Australia just how hot it can get. Last year we had record heatwaves. This year we have certainly had many days over 43 degrees. This does produce significant stress especially on the elderly. We saw in the 2008-09 heatwaves that people had a lot of complications and found it very difficult to keep cool in their own homes. Certainly, a number of people have approached me who do not have insulation and cannot afford air-conditioning. Enabling these people to put insulation into their homes will be particularly important.

The Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2010 also proposes an extra \$510 million for the Solar Homes and Communities Plan. This program will be replaced by the solar credit scheme, but they both provide assistance to households, small businesses and community groups for the cost of installing solar panels on their roofs. Once again, this has been a particularly exciting and well taken up program. I know that the opposition will say, 'Well, it was our program.' But let us just contrast how many people have taken this up in the two years that we have been in government. In less than two years, as of November, the government was on track to fund more than 120,000 installations of solar panels. This compares to just 10,000 rebates funded over the entire period of the previous government. This is another example of where this government is taking practical action to help people reduce their energy costs and to let them feel like they are making a contribution to reducing their greenhouse gas emissions. I do know, despite what the opposition might have us believe, that people are concerned about climate change. They do want to do their bit to reduce carbon emissions, and the assistance through the government's energy efficient home package and the solar credit scheme will specifically do that.

Specifically, \$40 million will also be provided to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to meet the increasing demands of general employee entitlements and the redundancy scheme caused by the significant increase in bankruptcies and insolvencies. I have spoken about this before, and I anticipate that the reforms in the Bankruptcy Legislation Amendment Bill 2009 will pass through the Senate committee process. Additionally, this bill provides more remedial assistance to those affected by the provisions in this bill.

Finally, these appropriations bills propose an additional \$12.5 million for the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government for the Local Government Reform Fund. This will allow the fund to continue helping councils to manage their infrastructure plans for the future and will assist in the construction of community buildings such as libraries, community centres, sports grounds and environmental infrastructure.

I make the point that this is really important for electorates like the electorate of Kingston. It is an outer metropolitan electorate where a lot of the community infrastructure was built perhaps 30 or 40 years ago, and nothing has really been done on that community infrastructure since. So 40 years later we see infrastructure that is ageing and—unfortunately for the local council—it is in need of repair and update all at the same time because it was all built at the same time. This is causing significant concern for the council and also shows that when infrastructure is built it does need a plan for how you are going to update it, because 30 years does come around pretty quickly. In my electorate we see the need for significant upgrades in community infrastructure but, at the same time as the infrastructure that was built 30 years ago needs updating, we also see new suburbs being built that are in desperate need of this sort of community infrastructure.

Once again, the government's Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan did provide significant money to enable a lot of local community infrastructure. I was very pleased to see that the council put that money into

things in my electorate such as upgrading footpaths, which were in dire need of upgrading or, in fact, needed to be put in. It sounds like a very small thing, but not having footpaths is a really difficult thing, whether for parents trying to walk around pushing prams, or for older people in their gophers. Footpaths are just a basic thing to be provided, and I take this opportunity to reflect what my constituents are saying. Whether it is local or state government, these footpaths really do need to be made a priority. So I am very pleased that the money that the federal government gives will really help local government plan for the future in terms of infrastructure. I just want to note that footpaths really need to be one of those things.

In conclusion, it is important that we pass these appropriation bills in a timely fashion because they will provide money to some significantly popular programs that are creating some real stimulus in the economy. We know that the opposition wants to pull the rug out from under the stimulus, but these programs are on the ground, helping to ensure that people remain employed and building some significant benefits for the future of Australia. I commend the bills to the House.