Terry Mills  
Leader of the Opposition

Treasurer between a rock and a hard place

26 March 2004

After being caught out in recent weeks telling ‘porkies' to the Northern Territory public over Grants Commission funding, Treasurer Stirling’s fibs are again coming back to bite him and Territorians at today's Treasurer's conference in Canberra.

The Leader of the Opposition, Terry Mills, has seized on comments by the New South Wales Labor Treasurer, Michael Egan, that he will be entering today's meeting trying to change the Grants Commission funding formula.

Mr Egan has indicated that he will be petitioning the conference to have the formula by which smaller remote states receive funding at a higher per capita basis changed – a move that will disadvantage Territorians and is not acceptable, Mr Mills said today.

‘The Northern Territory Treasurer's deceit has followed him to Canberra, as it has been revealed that it is his Labor mates in NSW who are setting the Grants Commission funding agenda, not the Federal Treasurer.

‘Two weeks ago he was claiming that the Federal Treasurer would take funding away from the Territory if Mr Stirling did not put up electricity prices. Today it is clear that this was not true and that the Labor Premiers are the real villains.

‘Will Treasurer Stirling stand up to his Labor backers down south or will he let this one go, knowing that it would highlight his deception – this is Syd's dilemma.

‘We have been in contact with the Federal Treasurer's office today to make sure the Territory's position on this funding issue has been heard. That position is clearly that the principles of ‘fiscal equalisation' must remain, and that the Territory must be compensated for the higher costs of delivering comparable services to the public.

‘The Country Liberal Party is the only Territory party, and we will fight to ensure that the rights of Territorians come above party allegiances.

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