Question Date: 23/11/99
Member: Mr ELFERINK
To: CHIEF MINISTER

Status: Questions

Information:
The news that you and South Australian Premier, John Olsen, had successfully secured the necessary federal funding for the completion of the Adelaide to Darwin rail link was applauded openly by politicians from all sides of the political fence. Even the Leader of the Northern Territory branch of the Australian Labor Party said it was 'a great day for the Territory and a great day for Territorians'. Why then has Labor done everything it can to knock the rail project and attempted to create doubt in the mind of Territorians since welcoming your success?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, the question reveals a disturbing aspect of the way the Labor Party does business in the Northern Territory ...

Ms Martin: Pull your head in, Denis! Tell the truth.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr BURKE: The Leader of the Opposition said, 'Pull your head in, Denis' - a very unkind comments.

Apart from that one burst of energy where she applauded the project, we've seen nothing but Labor knock every initiative of government. 'We support native title, but ...', and then they go on to knock it. 'We support statehood, but ...', and then they go on to knock it. 'We support the railway, but ...'; and all we've seen since that first announcement has been a continual knocking of the railway project, not only from herself but also from Senator Crossin and the federal Labor member, Warren Snowdon.

We're delivering in the Northern Territory, as the Treasurer rightly said, the largest infrastructure project in Australia since the Snowy Mountains scheme, and all the Labor Party can do is knock the project. We are delivering a growth economy that is the envy of other states in Australia. The Labor Party continues to knock it. We are delivering the lowest unemployment in Australia. Labor continues to knock it. Shortly we will be putting our energy into delivering just that - energy - from the Timor Sea gas fields. No doubt Labor will also knock that.

I can give the Labor Party of the Northern Territory a little indication of how Territorians feel, young and old - Territorians born here and some of them who no longer live here. This is a letter from B.R. Smythe, who lives in Eltham and wrote to me asking for reservations on the first new Darwin train. He is obviously an elderly gentleman.

Members interjecting.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr BURKE: Listen to this. You might learn something. It will educate you.

I ask for my family to be included with 4 first-class sleeper tickets on, if possible, the first train, and enclose a cheque for deposit of $500.
My father embarked at Terowie in October 1919 for Oodnadatta en route to take up a position as mounted constable at Alice Springs. His family, including the writer, endured his interminable fulminations on the subject of the rail link over many years. I am fulfilling a commitment to him to make every endeavour to be on the first train when it should eventuate.

The first of my several journeys on the Ghan was in early 1941. I also travelled from Birdum/Larrimah under steam during the war, before Leaping Lena met her demise.

As a Territorian born and bred, and with family in Darwin, may I wish every success to this venture that we have talked about and smiled about, and hoped for, for so many years.

I have put the cheque for $500 to the Receiver of Public Moneys. It will be the great pleasure of this government to ensure that 4 first-class sleeper berths are afforded to him on the first passenger train that rolls into Darwin upon this wonderful railway line.

That is the sort of optimism and determination that Territorians have expressed for many years, and the Labor leader and her colleagues should join in that sort of congratulatory praise of the great enterprise that the CLP government and many chief ministers and many others over many, many years have finally secured for the Northern Territory. A project worth $1230m to which the Territory contribution is $165m - on any estimation that’s a great deal.

There has been some concern about local industry participation in the project, and I take the opportunity to talk quickly on that. The preferred consortium was required to submit a plan to outline maximisation of local industry participation. The local industry participation plan states that 70% of the value of construction will be local employment and would source from local industry in Northern Territory and South Australia. The construction phase of the project is worth approximately $1000m.

Detailed discussions were held with the preferred consortium last week to further develop its commitment to local industry participation. Key outcomes of these discussions were a reaffirmation of the 70% of local content target during the construction phase, agreement that the Territory would be the first choice of sourcing labour for the project and agreement that the construction headquarters, including the purchasing office, will be located in Darwin and that officers of the Northern Territory Industry Search and Opportunities Office will be based in the purchasing office to help the sourcing of local goods and services.

There will also be opportunities for Aboriginal employment and contracting by establishing contractual arrangements including joint-venture opportunities with Aboriginal organisations with the appropriate skills and expertise. There will be a whole range of forums conducted throughout the Northern Territory to ensure that all Territory businesses have an opportunity to participate in the project.

It might be also of interest if I quickly gave some indication of where local industry can participate. I'm talking South Australia and the Northern Territory, of course: Rail $131m, sleepers $80m, quarry products $38m, sleeper fasteners $27m, precast beams $40m, concrete $4m, reinforcement $2m, structured seals $6m, camp buildings $10.7m, camp catering $13m, road transport $14.7m, rail transport $7m, air charters $18m, culvert pipes $21m, cement $3.3m. In addition to the items I mentioned above, miscellaneous sundries $1m, house rental, etc.

In terms of subcontracts ...
This is a wonderful project for the Northern Territory. It will breathe life into all of the regional centres of the Northern Territory, with construction located primarily out of Tennant Creek and Katherine and the major sourcing of goods obviously coming through Alice Springs.

I simply ask the opposition to join with government and join with Territorians generally in getting behind and applauding not only the project but also the excellent work that government officers have conducted and will continue to conduct to ensure we take maximum opportunity during the course of the construction of this project.