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Question : AustralAsia Railway - Additional Government Funds

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Member : Ms MARTIN
To : CHIEF MINISTER

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Information :
Labor welcomes the commitment of additional government funds to the railway project. Labor, both in the Territory and nationally, because Kim Beazley has been a promoter of this railway long before the Chief Minister even dreamed of coming to the Northern Territory, even dreamed about it anyway. Labor welcomes the commitment of additional government funds to the railway project so this stalled project can proceed as soon as possible to kick start the Territory economy which the Chief Minister has run into the ground over the past two years. But Territorians deserve to know where the money is coming from, and I ask the Chief Minister will it be an increase in debt or a further cut in services and capital works given we already have the highest per capita debt in the country. Will you tell Territorians what the budget bottom line over the next three years will be, as the cash is outlaid for the railway? What do your forward estimates predict is the expected increase in Territory debt by the time the first train runs in 2003?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition's question again highlights how hypocritical she is. This is a person who stands in this Chamber today and says she welcomes the extra commitment to the railway. Now, this is the same person who only a week ago, two weeks ago, three weeks ago, six weeks ago, said every day, 'The Territory government shouldn't commit another penny to this project'. That is what she has been running every day - 'It should all come from the Commonwealth. If Kim Beazley was the leader in government, he'd provide $300m'.

Now she changes her tune today - 'We welcome the government's commitment'. Now stand up and be counted. You are the slipperiest Leader of the Opposition and the most devious we have ever had to deal with. She can't lie straight in bed ...

Members interjecting.

Mr BURKE: This person cannot lie straight in bed. She had one of her ...

Mr STIRLING: A point of order, Mr Speaker! We can't have ...

Mr SPEAKER: There is a point of order. The Chief Minister should withdraw that comment. The Chief Minister should withdraw.

Members interjecting.

Mr BURKE: In that context, I withdraw.

One of her federal masters, Martin Ferguson said only a week ago that $50m extra was too much. Where was she then? Was she out there disputing Martin Ferguson? Silence! She was agreeing with Martin Ferguson. There are far more things to do in the Northern Territory than spend $50m' - that is what Martin Ferguson was saying only last week. Now, you can't come into this Chamber the following week and say, The Labor Party welcomes the additional commitment.
Mr Speaker, that is a straight out mistruth. And it reinforces what the deputy has been saying. This person has never supported the railway project. She has never wanted more money put in the project, no matter where it came from. That has been reinforced by her political colleagues in Canberra. They would not make a commitment to this railway.

My 12-year-old son said to me the other day ...

Members interjecting.

Mr BURKE: I will tell you what a 12-year-old Territorians said. A 12-year-old Territorian said to me, 'Dad, I'll give you a good question'. I said, 'What's that?'. He said, 'Why don't you ask Labor when is a promise not a promise?' You know what his answer was? 'When it's an old promise'. That was a 12-year-old's answer. 'When it's an old promise coming from the Labor Party'. Because that is all Kim Beazley has been able to say.

The Leader of the Opposition has been running the line, 'Kim Beazley will commit $300. The federal Labor government will commit $300 to this project'. What does Kim Beazley say? 'Not on your nellie! Not on your nellie!' But he was saying it a couple of years ago, in a roundabout way. But if he thinks he has a chance of being the Prime Minister of this country, what is he saying now - 'Not on your nellie, that is an old promise. What I'd prefer is, let's have an inquiry'. 'Let's have an inquiry, that is a far better commitment'.

This Leader of the Opposition cannot come into this Chamber and say she welcomes the additional commitment to the railway because that is a straight out mistruth. You don't welcome the commitment. You never believed in the railway, you wanted to see it scuttled, and you are disappointed it is not scuttled. That is the truth. Go out there and tell Territorians the truth.

When it comes to additional funds, let's understand this: Any additional funds that may be provided - and I use the word may - may have to be provided, because the first tranche of funds would not be required for about 12 to 18 months - all of the money will be provided on commercial terms. All of the money may be able to be off-sold to a private investor and a great deal of the money might never ever be called upon from the governments.

Now, in terms of forward estimates and all those kinds of things, I am sure in due course the Treasurer will answer that question.