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Question : AustralAsia Railway - Effect on Health Care Spending

Question Date : 20/02/2001
Member : Mr BALCH
To : MINISTER for HEALTH, FAMILY and CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Status : Questions

Information :
Earlier this month, the Productivity Commission reported that the Northern Territory spends the highest per capita of all Australian jurisdictions on the health of Territorians. How will the prosperity and growth generated by the Darwin to Alice Springs railway continue this trend and help provide the best possible health care for Territorians?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, indeed it is true that my portfolio responsibilities see me as a big spender in the Northern Territory. And I have a little truth to let the Labor Party into, and that is to spend money, you have to earn money. That is why I welcome the railway, and I welcome what it will bring to the Territory, because it means that the good health services that we've built in this place, and there's some tens of millions of dollars in upgrading our facilities underway as we speak, those great enterprises will continue to be able to rely on the buoyancy of this economy. It is buoyant under this CLP government and it will remain to.

The advent of the railway will bring a few other benefits to us also in that we have long recognised - and the reason I carry responsibilities for social and health issues is we realise there's a nexus between the two. We've long understood that one of the precursors to ill health, particularly among indigenous people, has been unemployment and we are aware that a project like the railway, which encompasses the breadth of the Northern Territory from top to bottom, will have massive spinoffs for many small communities along the length and breadth of the Territory. There will be ample opportunity for employment for Aboriginal people and there will be ample opportunity in the future for the railway to be a catalyst for development for small communities that exist up along the track. That was certainly the case in the previous railway which was prematurely shut down which serviced towns like Union Reef and Brock's Creek and Grove Hill and Larrimah, towns which when the railway ceased to run virtually died - they were pretty much ghost towns.

I suspect that this railway will be a great boon to economic activity right up and down the Northern Territory. It will mean that employment opportunities for remote Territorians, particularly in Katherine and Tennant Creek but also in the remote Aboriginal communities along the Track, will mean that they can participate in this great venture for the Territory, and the buoyancy that it will bring us can be further deployed into making sure that the Territory still has great social programs like our great programs in education and particularly in health, my portfolio responsibility.

As a great spender, I am also with my PAWA responsibilities a great earner, and it is my hope that as the Territory grows the commercial instrumentation, which is the Power and Water Authority, will be able to provide greater capacity to reduce the costs of electricity because we'll have more people living here, we'll have more industry, and we'll have a great opportunity to make sure that those benefits are passed on to domestic consumers.

So I think the railway is yet another great step in our economic stewardship of this place. I know that its benefits will definitely spin through to the social portfolios, particularly mine in health, and I welcome the break through the Chief Minister had with the Prime Minister in recent days and I'm entirely confident that this project will go ahead to the benefit of all Territorians.