Sixth Assembly First Session 30/11/93 Parliament Record No.23

Question Date: Question No:

Question: Alice Springs to Darwin Railway

Member: Mr SETTER
To: MINISTER for TRANSPORT and WORKS

Status: Answers to Written Questions

Information:
Mr SETTER to MINISTER for TRANSPORT and WORKS

Before the last federal election, the Territory's federal Labor members, Hon Warren Snowdon and Senator Bob Collins, made great play of what the ALP federal government intended to do in relation to the railway. In fact, $3m was allocated in the 1993-94 budget for the purpose of completing the survey of the railway line. Has that money been allocated and what is the status of the whole project at this stage?

ANSWER

Mr Speaker, following the federal government's announcement that it would allocate $3m to complete the survey work on the Darwin to Alice Springs rail corridor, the Territory government has been attempting to advance the issue and ensure that it leads to some worthwhile results. Last month, I wrote to the federal Minister for Transport and Communications, Senator Bob Collins, to ascertain progress with planning for the work and to make several suggestions to expedite it and to ensure that the results are what is needed. I am pleased to say that I received a reply this week from the minister. I believe that members will be interested in its contents because it indicates the level of federal support for the project ...

Mr Ede: Will you table that?

Mr MANZIE: Most certainly, I will. However, for the benefit of members, I will quote from parts of the letter in which Senator Bob Collins stated:

I appreciate the Northern Territory government's support in completing the project. The government attaches a high priority to this project to facilitate the development of commercially-viable proposals for the railway's construction.

I intend to work closely with the Northern Territory government on this survey, and see merit in Commonwealth officials maintaining regular contact with their Northern Territory counterparts during the tender process and the survey. This will ensure that the $3m funding that the government has made available is used to achieve an outcome that will be most useful for a future developer. I see this liaison as focusing on the completion of the survey in an effective and timely manner, and involving matters of access for surveyors and the identification of engineering, sacred sites and other related issues.

It will be interesting if there is again a failure to identify a sacred site. Will we end up with a future problem like that at Taylor Street? We will have to wait and see.

Mr Ede: We will fix it.

Mr MANZIE: I digress. I apologise for my laughter. I will continue to quote from the Senator's letter:
The desired outcome is to have a clearly identified and surveyed route suitable for a railway. This would allow the Northern Territory government to act to reserve the route so that it would be available for use by a later developer.

In relation to the contract for survey work on the route, I am not as pleased with what the Senator had to say in respect of what I appreciate is Commonwealth policy:

The Commonwealth is concerned to ensure that it receives value for money in the survey work. The contract will be subject to free and open tender and Northern Territory companies are welcome to bid. However, Commonwealth government policy precludes preference being shown for Territory-based business, although local knowledge and experience may well be to the Northern Territory bidders' advantage.

I certainly welcome the federal government's commitment to the project. I hope that a Territory company will end up with the work because, as honourable members are aware, we have very capable companies in the Territory. Unfortunately, the experience with the transfer of the Commonwealth government's Department of Housing and Construction to Adelaide from the Territory is that it is becoming increasingly difficult for Territory government companies - sorry, Territory companies to get...

Mr Bailey: 'Territory government companies' - you were right the first time.

Mr MANZIE: Mr Speaker, the member for Wanguri's comment needs to be recorded in Hansard because it is typical of the Australian Labor Party. Labor members do not support Territory business. They do not support jobs for Territorians.

Mr Bailey: We do, but on a fair basis - not by picking winners as you blokes do. We would not buy furniture factories.

Mr MANZIE: An example of the extent to which the member for Wanguri supports the federal government in ensuring that jobs are maintained for Territorians is the fact that we have not heard one whisper from him in relation to the 2000 Commonwealth jobs that the Commonwealth statistician says have been transferred out of the Territory since 1986. That is what the federal Labor government does, and members opposite are a branch of that organisation - 250 000 pieces of silver have ensured that they dance to their federal master's tune.

Mr Bailey: Is that more or less than you blokes gave to the member for Casuarina?

Mr MANZIE: Any suggestion that, somehow or other, we should be ensuring that Territory contractors are not disadvantaged in relation to Commonwealth contracts brings derision from the benches opposite. That typifies the reason why they are sitting across the Chamber from the government and, until they realise that they must support Territorians, they will always sit over there.

I will conclude by saying that I welcome the federal government's commitment to this project. It makes a change from the Territory government going it alone over the years to lay the essential foundations for the railway construction that will follow inevitably. I thank Senator Collins for his support on this issue, and I table his letter.