

SMALL BUSINESS POLICY — BARNETT GOVERNMENT

Motion

HON LJILJANNA RAVLICH (East Metropolitan) [3.51 pm]: Thank you, Mr President.

Hon Liz Behjat: Look who it is!

Several members interjected.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Where is Hon Ed Dermer when I need him? Where is he? There he is!

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm): Order, members, please; a little decorum, thank you!

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy President. I move —

- (1) That this house condemns the Minister for Commerce for his failure to produce a small business policy and calls on the minister to outline what he will do to assist small businesses and Western Australian workers who have been adversely impacted by the global financial crisis.
- (2) That this house calls on the minister to explain —
 - (a) his government's policies to deal with the impact of the global financial crisis on small business and the thousands of workers who lose their jobs and require retraining;
 - (b) what strategies he has put in place to protect small businesses and their workers;
 - (c) what practical assistance is available to small businesses that go bust and the thousands of workers who lose their jobs; and
 - (d) why he has been asleep at the wheel whilst small businesses in Western Australia go under.

Once again, notice of this motion was given on 19 March 2009. It was put together when the opposition had not long been out of office. It became quite apparent that the government did not have policies, and of course the small business policy was in fact another case in point. It is interesting that, although the government did not have a small business policy then, it still does not have a small business policy to guide the direction of the small business sector. This motion therefore condemns the minister for not producing a small business policy. It also calls on the minister to outline what he will do to assist small businesses and Western Australian workers who have been adversely impacted by the global financial crisis. It also calls on the minister to explain a number of things.

When I was going through my proposed motions some time back, I was looking to remove any motion that may no longer be relevant, may be outdated or may be obsolete. When I re-read this motion I must say to the house that I decided then once again that it was relevant. It certainly had not lost its importance, given the time that has passed, as there is no doubt that small business in this state is still being impacted by the flowthrough from the global financial crisis. If members think that small business is doing well out there in the broader community, they would be well advised to think again. Small business is hurting. I make the point when I do media on tourism in particular that tourism operators are small businesses. Tourism is doing particularly poorly in this state and it is flowing through to small business. The second part of this motion calls on the minister to explain the policies to deal with the impact of the global financial crisis on small business and the thousands of workers who lose their jobs and require retraining. We have never seen that. Perhaps the minister representing the minister for small business will be able to provide that information to this place. The second part of the motion also calls on the minister to explain —

- (b) what strategies he has put into place to protect small businesses and their workers;
- (c) what practical assistance is available to small businesses that go bust and the thousands of workers who lose their jobs; ...

There are small businesses that go bust.

Hon Norman Moore: Thousands of jobs lost?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: People do lose their jobs.

Hon Norman Moore: I am just asking you: is that what you are saying?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Can the Leader of the House tell me? Is he saying that no worker lost his or her job during the global financial crisis?

Hon Norman Moore: I am asking you.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I would say that thousands of people lost their jobs through the global financial crisis.

Hon Norman Moore: It's your motion, not mine. You say there were thousands of jobs lost. It's your motion.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I am sure; no problem at all. Hon Norman Moore might recall that he asked me, when he brought a prayer for relief into this place from his learned friend Mr Crichton-Browne, to substantiate a lot of things that I said in a speech; and that the Procedure and Privileges Committee ruled that I had no case to answer because I did substantiate those things. So, Mr Norman Moore, the honourable Leader of the House —

Hon Norman Moore: Excuse me, Mr Deputy President, what's this got to do with the price of eggs?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: No, no! If the Leader of the House is telling me that thousands of jobs were not lost during the global financial crisis —

Hon Norman Moore: I didn't say that at all. I just said that you should substantiate your motion.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Of course.

Hon Norman Moore: That's what your motion said, that thousands lost their jobs. I'm just asking: can you substantiate that? Can you?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I can.

Hon Norman Moore: Go for it! Please go for it.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I can and I will. But if the Leader of the House is asking me to give him the figures now, I will direct my —

Hon Norman Moore: Then I will tell you about Norm Marlborough.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order members! Just quickly, Hon Ljiljanna Ravlich will be pleased to know that I certainly will not interject on her if she directs all her comments through the Chair and continue on. There are only 10 minutes or so left, so please make the most of those 10 minutes.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Thanks, Mr Deputy President.

In relation to the exact numbers who have lost their jobs during the global financial crisis, I will make every endeavour to provide this house with the information on net job losses during 2008 and 2009. I will make every endeavour to find that information and, when we continue debate on this motion next week, to put that information before the house.

Having said that, it is not to suggest that there have not been some indicators of recovery in the past six months. But I must say to you, Mr Deputy President, that the level of recovery is not such that we can have total confidence. In fact, some 60 000 people in this state are currently unemployed and looking for work. That information was made available in *The West Australian* only last week in an article that dealt with the issues of the skills shortage and future skill requirements. Those issues became topical for a few days, given that the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia had produced some future projections on what those skill requirements might be. However, I believe the house has every right to call on the minister to explain which strategies the government has put into place to deal with the question of those workers who have lost their jobs. For example, we already know that apprentices in the training system numbered fewer than 5 000. Those 5 000 apprentices would have been indentured to an employer or to a group training scheme. The loss of those 5 000 apprentices alone, who would have all been suspended, is the answer to the Leader of the House's question—never mind any other job losses over and above that figure. The fact is that we know that 5 000 apprentices lost their jobs —

Hon Peter Collier: So you acknowledge that it was because of the global financial crisis.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: Of course.

Hon Peter Collier: You said it was my fault, now you are saying it is the global financial crisis. Make your mind up!

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I said that the Minister for Training and Workforce Development did not do anything to help bring the apprentices back. That is what I am blaming him for; he did not do anything to bring those jobs back and they have been lost and the state has lost the skills of those apprentices.

Hon Peter Collier: You have just contradicted yourself. It will be in *Hansard* now!

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: For goodness sake; big deal!

Hon Norman Moore: You spend a lot of time putting stuff in *Hansard*! I do not know why you would put it in if it is no big deal.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: I have said time and again that those jobs were lost. The minister should have saved them, but he just let them walk. He did nothing. He needs to explain why it all happened and why he was asleep at the wheel and why he did so very little. To make the point again, members might remember that there was a motion on the notice paper about small business and the uncertainty surrounding small business. In that case it was a motion about small business centres, their network and the future of the Small Business Development Corporation, and I have to say that that motion took two years. It took two years to actually get a straight answer from the government. In that case, Hon Norman Moore, after two years of uncertainty, gave some information to this place to allay the concerns of the small business sector about the future of the Small Business Development Corporation. That took two years.

Hon Norman Moore: That is how long it took to get to the motion, for goodness sake! Any minute now the global financial crisis might finish, with a bit of luck. Your motion implies that we are just going into it. Everyone else thinks that we are coming out of it. This is how ridiculous these motions are.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The Leader of the House's problem is that he represents the North West and therefore he thinks that everything that happens in the state happens in the North West. I know where the wealth of this state is created; I do not have a problem with that. The Leader of the House should ask a small business tourism operator—a bed and breakfast down south —

Hon Norman Moore: Do you know what is causing the problems for the tourism industry?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: It is a combination of factors.

Hon Norman Moore: Probably the value of the dollar more than anything else.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: It is not just the value of the dollar. There needs to be an event of some substance on the events calendar. Here is a classic case, now that the Leader of the House has raised this issue. I went onto the tourism website and saw that the most highly regarded event in Western Australia, right at the top of the webpage, is Sculpture by the Sea at Cottesloe. That is the biggest event! I do not have a problem with Sculpture by the Sea —

Hon Norman Moore: There used to be a really good event called Rally Australia that you gave away. Your government gave it away. Remember that one; remember that good event?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: We might have got rid of one event, but we did not get rid of 12. When the Leader of the House was in opposition, he used to go on and on about the state of excitement, and how Perth was Dullsville and it was boring here. The Leader of the House, of all people, said it was boring, and that when he got into office, it would be boring no more! Guess what? It got even more boring. The government, and the member in particular, has done nothing to make this place more exciting—absolutely nothing.

We can sit here and say that the Australian dollar is getting stronger and stronger, and that it is adversely impacting on small businesses. Shall we just leave it at that?

Hon Norman Moore: I am wondering who you are going to blame next. Who are you going to blame for the Aussie dollar?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The bottom line is that the Leader of the House seems to have lost any sense of ministerial responsibility and his concept of accountability. Ever since he moved over to that side of this place, he has not accepted responsibility for anything. All of a sudden the Leader of the House and the government that he is a part of are not accountable for anything.

Hon Norman Moore: I just asked you what you thought the main problem facing the tourism industry was. I thought it might have been the cost of the dollar —

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: There is not just one cause —

Hon Norman Moore: — which has nothing to do with the state government at all, or my accountability.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: When it is cheaper to fly to Bali for two weeks than to go Rottneest Island for four or five days with the family, if I were the Minister for Tourism, I would be having a very serious look at the price structure. The first thing —

Hon Norman Moore: The first thing that you should understand is that Rottneest should not be a subsidised holiday. Is that what you are saying it should be?

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: The Leader of the House needs to look very carefully at the Rottnest Island Authority Act. He might remember this, because he has been here longer than the island! The object of the act is that Rottnest Island should be a holiday destination for local families —

Hon Norman Moore: Do you know where most visitors to Rottnest Island come from? From where you live.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: We can talk about where I live.

Hon Norman Moore: That is where most who go to Rottnest Island come from. If you think we should be subsidising western suburbs residents' holidays to Rottnest, you should say so.

Hon LJILJANNA RAVLICH: If the price structure was more family friendly, clearly more families from everywhere would be going.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.