

MEDIA RELEASE

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FORREST ACCUSES GOVERNMENT OF MISLEADING PARLIAMENT

Murchison MLC, Ruth Forrest is outraged to learn that she, and all Tasmanians, have been misled in Parliament by the Treasurer, Michael Aird after seeking answers to questions she asked in parliament in October and November last year.

"I am extremely disappointed and angry that the Government would mislead the Parliament and the people of Tasmania by lying about a situation as important as Health. The Government can easily find millions for football and racing but would lie about the state of our health system" stated an irate Ms Forrest.

Ms Forrest referred to questions she asked of the Treasurer during Question Time on the 31st October and 1st & 2nd November 2006, concerning the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) budget blow out of up to \$50 million. Leaked documents to The Mercury revealed that Ms Forrest was correct in her concerns when she raised this issue and this revelation demonstrates that the Treasurer has misled parliament.

The Treasurer replied to Ms Forrest question about the \$50 million overspend by stating "...The Honourable member is asking whether there is an existing \$50 million overrun now. No. Is there one to be expected at the end of the (financial) year? No."

Further the Treasurer, Hon Michael Aird stated "I am not aware and I do not know how you could be aware. The fact is, Mr President, there are always assertions and accusations and figures purported to be in relation to various allocations and portfolios at different times. If I chased every single figure put forward, it would be a full-time activity in itself. What the Honourable member needs to be interested in is that there has been a budget allocation made and that we are four months into the financial year....It would be a very strange set of circumstances where you would be able to say four months into the financial year that it is over budget by \$50 million. ...The question that you are asking is a nonsense, in fact".

"A strange set of circumstances indeed. Either the Treasurer has no understanding of the financial state of the Health department or he isn't being informed appropriately, as required under the Treasurer's own guidelines which require monthly reporting to the Treasurer. The Mercury newspaper has revealed that the nonsense, in fact, is the

Treasurer's attempt at a cover up of this information and by doing so has misled the Parliament" stated Ms Forrest.

"I also raised concerns that staff cuts and other reductions in services would be initiated in an attempt to reduce costs and it has now been revealed that immediate action, including a major crack down on spending with ward closures and cancellation of elective surgery being the likely consequences" said the Member for Murchison.

19th January 2007

For further information, please phone 0419 879 524.