



CONDSOLIDATED FUND APPROPRIATION BILL 2002 (No. 31)

Second Reading

Dr CREAN (Elwick - Treasurer - 2R) - Mr President, I move -

That the bill be now read the second time.

Mr PRESIDENT (Statement) - Honourable members, I believe most of you will be aware that when the House resolved on 29 May 2002 that the budget papers and the Consolidated Fund Appropriation Bill 2002 be noted, the 'take note' motion replaced our normal second reading debate. However, before putting the question that the bill be now read the second time, I understand the member for Rosevears wishes to make his first contribution in the Chamber, and accordingly I call the honourable member for Rosevears and ask that honourable members extend him the usual inaugural speech courtesies.

Mr FINCH (Rosevears - Inaugural) - Mr President, just before I turn my attention to the Budget, let me first of all thank the voters of my new electorate for their support during my first political campaign. As you would all understand, the people of Rosevears appreciated the chance to meet their candidate, to be able to let me know how they felt about issues and to question me about my opinions. Overwhelmingly the voters wanted to ensure that an independent was elected to the seat of Rosevears; the top four vote getters campaigned as independents.

People were confused about the name and the boundaries for the electorate; this was the first vote since the change of boundaries in 1996. Rosevears, although a significant historical name for the region, is also the name of a special area on the West Tamar. My campaign therefore was an educative one as well, and with only 80 per cent of eligible people casting a vote, there may be a requirement for more decisions to be made about local government elections because of the perception that the council vote is not compulsory.

My personal safety was never in question, it was to me a reflection of the democracy in which we live that I could travel the streets, meeting and talking to people on their doorsteps and in shopping centres without the fear of abuse or assault, and I could display my signs without concern that they would disappear because of underhand tactics. I thought often of the plight of people in other countries and their struggle to achieve the sort of voting system that we flourish under - countries such as East Timor and what those people had to endure; Zimbabwe and the turmoil that still exists there; and those other places where people do not have free political expression.

Thank you to my family and friends who helped me. They come from all walks of life and have differing beliefs and philosophies, not necessarily political. With every day of the campaign their guidance, suggestions and inspiration made me work even harder to achieve our goal. In particular, I express my gratitude to my campaign manager, my wife, Carole. The issues were, I am sure, familiar to you all - jobs, road safety, health, law and order, tourism, the environment and particularly a healthy river system for the Tamar, support for our schools and fairness in water pricing. I have committed myself to addressing these issues.

Mention must be made of the welcome extended to me from Parliament House. It started with my election when congratulatory messages came to me from people here that I had and had not met. Through those messages, I felt the overwhelming regard and support for those who are selected to represent their fellow Tasmanians in this House. My thanks to you, Mr President, and fellow honourable members, the members in the House of Assembly, the Clerk of the Council and the staff here and in Launceston. You have all given me a clear understanding that there does exist here an environment that is welcoming and encouraging for new members.

Finally, thank you to former President and member for Rosevears, Ray Bailey, whose retirement prompted me to stand for election. Mr Bailey will be remembered here for 12 years of thoughtful consideration of legislation and the leadership he showed as President. He has set the bar very high for me. I wish him, his wife Lynne and his family all the best for the future.

Mr President, being new to this House and not an expert on government fiscal planning, I will leave comment and close observations on this Budget to my more experienced colleagues, but I would like to speak on the public's perception of budget processes in general, without it being a comment on the fiscal skills of the State Treasurer, the honourable member for Elwick. I believe there is further scope for involvement of the Legislative Council in the budget process which might help to overcome some of the public's negative views of government economic policies.

Mr President, we see it time and time again, parliament after parliament - particularly in the Federal Parliament - the cynical three-year pattern. Year one, the austerity budget: on the back of an election win a government thinks it can afford to be tough. Some non-core spending promises are dropped; the previous Government may be blamed for black holes. This may be the most responsible budget in the three-year cycle but it usually lacks the long-term view. The attitude is, 'Let's just get through the next couple of years and set the base for the pork barrel the year after next'. Year two, the steady-as-she-goes budget with the Government increasingly focused on poll day in about 18 months. Year three, the sweetener: the vote-buying budget, the bring-home-the-bacon budget. It is the each-way budget: if the poll seems doubtful, the full vote-buying program with little thought for the fiscal future; if the polls are bleak, the over-the-top budget with future booby traps for the incoming rival government, which in turn makes the allegations of black holes.

Mr President, this is no way to run a country or a State; we must have the long-term vision. I believe that increasingly in this State there is evidence of a longer-term element in the financial planning of Tasmanian governments. The public recognises this; voters are increasingly aware of any fiscal shenanigans. Making them aware is

part of the role of this Council. The public is prepared to support State governments which sacrifice short-term popularity for the long haul. The Legislative Council is perhaps better placed than State governments to have a long haul vision. With its six-year terms and staggered elections, it is structured to stabilise the process of government. Since 1998 with the establishment of the budget Estimates committees, this Council has been more closely involved with the budget process, and particularly with the budgets of the Treasurer being brought down from here. It will, I hope, become even more positive in this role in the future, particularly if there is more time allocated for preparation before the deliberations. Nevertheless, it is time for this Council, with its structural advantages, to take an even more active role in smoothing the bumps of the three-year cycle. We can give greater continuity and stability. This Council is ideally placed to view the long term, to place budget policy in the big frame in partnership with State governments.

Mr President, as I said earlier, I am no expert on State budget policy, but I would like to explain my view on one long-term fiscal policy that can exploit the great opportunities in this State and secure the future of our community. One of our problems is our small population. Our people create our wealth and wellbeing. Our birth rate, as in much of the developed world, is low so we must exploit every possible way to maintain an optimum population for sustainable economic growth. We can attract people with the right skills and we can develop our own, but the key is our children. We can have no objection to our children leaving us to further their skills, knowledge and experience. They must travel, they must see the world to really appreciate Tasmania. I fully support this, but we must have policies to bring them home. We must make Tasmania an attractive place for them to return to, to bring them back with their experience and their abilities. Where we cannot provide the increasingly sophisticated learning institutions we must help our young people find them elsewhere rather than resent their leaving. We can foster educational links between our institutions and those elsewhere. We can smooth the way for young Tasmanians to move easily and for them to return and enrich our society.

Mr President, initiatives in and near my electorate of Rosevears have been developed and continue to be developed for our young people and to attract young people from elsewhere. The University of Tasmania, Launceston Campus, the Australian Maritime College, TAFE, the Australian School of Fine Furniture and last week the Academy of the Arts at Inveresk are all part of that long-term vision and must be part of long-term fiscal planning. The Legislative Council has a vital role in this.

Mr President, it is close to 20 years ago today when you, as the new honourable member for Launceston, made your first speech in this House on 22 June 1982, as I am sure you will recall. Among other things you referred to the future role of the Legislative Council with some foresight. You said that while there was very considerable respect in the community for this House and what it stands for, it was seen as having a negative role and the honourable member went on to say there was great scope for a more positive and initiating role. He recommended not just ad hoc committees to respond to particular issues that arise from time to time but a system of committees to investigate other areas of government activity and to make recommendations on policy developments. The honourable member spoke of a committee system which would scrutinise government expenditure and look closely

into State budgets. Uncanny predictions by the then honourable member for Launceston.

I am pleased to be on two committees in the system he recommended, one of which was the budget Estimates committee which has almost concluded and which has been for me a most worthwhile experience not only for the enlightenment it gave me on budget matters but for the scrutiny we gave to the Budget on behalf of all Tasmanians. The other committee is the joint Standing Committee on Community Development. I was appointed on my first day here and I am led to believe it is some sort of record. I have also been seconded to the parliamentary Library Committee.

Mr President, have we not come a long way in 20 years? I am sure the public does see this House in a more positive light, but we cannot rest. Mr President, I would like to see the Legislative Council even more involved in the making of policy, particularly those long-term policies for the benefit of Tasmania. This House has and can move with the times. In your speech 20 years ago you said it was well equipped to take a greater role and to have a greater say in the government of this State. This is still the case. We must work even more closely with State governments for the future of Tasmania and its people.

Mr President and honourable members, I look forward to working with you in the best interests of the people of Tasmania and in the interests of my constituents of Rosevears.

Members - Hear, hear.