

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to reiterate the Tasmanian Labor Party's support for the public sector.

This government has a proud track record of investment in public services, support for public servants and ensuring the provision of quality public services to the community.

When Labor took the office we made a rock solid commitment to no forced redundancies, to invest in the public services and deliver fairness to the public sector workforce. Though we have faced many challenges over the last decade, we have met these vital commitments.

Having taken Government following the Liberal-Green minority Government which oversaw forced redundancies, a sale of public assets and key infrastructure, raiding trust funds and a budget in crisis, it has been a priority for Labor to reinvigorate the public service.

In 1999 the population of the state was shrinking, the skills exodus was impacting on the delivery of government services and the community had lost confidence in the capacity of the then Government to deliver.

The Bartlett Labor Government has proudly supported the public sector and worked with public sector unions, including the CPSU, to achieve significant gains for Tasmania and we will continue to do so. Together we have produced ten consecutive budget surpluses, eliminated general Government net debt and put the State of Tasmania in a very strong financial position to work our way through the most challenging financial times in a century.

In 2009 more than ever, the Government has expected a great deal from the public sector employees in the delivering government programs and services. There is an immense reservoir of expertise, experience and creativity that resides right now in our public service, and the Government is not prepared to let that go. Whilst we have needed to tighten our belts, we have worked hard not to lose the very assets that will enable us to pull Tasmania through an economic downturn.

Even in the most difficult financial circumstances for half a century Labor has maintained its responsibilities to the Tasmanian people through quarantines on frontline services from budget cuts by protecting schools, hospitals, police services and infrastructure spending.

Fairness

Over the last decade the Labor Government has invested heavily in the services needed by our communities every day. Education spending has increase by more than 70 per cent, health spending has more than doubled, we have recruited more nurses and doctors, reduced the average size of primary and secondary school classes and increased spending on roads and infrastructure. Labor has delivered significant wage increases across the public service, particularly in areas of skills shortages. Labor will continue to deliver competitive wage outcomes for public servants and invest in supporting public servants.

Only a strong partnership with the public service has allowed the labor Government to deal with the budget decline brought about by the global financial crisis. That we could meet these challenges was in large part because of the strong budget record over 10 years. Labor did not

need to cut the 3000 public servants that the Liberal Party proposed, nor did we need to cut public servant wages by 20 per cent as proposed by the Greens.

As the economy and budget returns to normal, Labor will continue to invest in vital services for the Tasmanian community. The Government will continue to meet the cost of negotiated wages outcomes and in negotiating these outcomes there will be a greater emphasis on working smarter to achieve productivity gains.

Labor has never undertaken the bureaucrat bashing that has been the approach of both opposition parties who regard any support worker as needless expense, without regard to the impact that reductions in support staff can have on direct services in schools, health facilities and across Government.

Security

There will not be forced redundancies under a Labor Government. Despite the impact of the global financial crisis the Government resisted Opposition calls for forced redundancies. We have shown this strength even in the most difficult of financial circumstances.

Departments will continue to be funded appropriately to deliver services and ensure that community access to services is not impacted by day to day budget management.

Labor has a long standing commitment to permanent employment as the preferred and principal form of employment in the public sector. Labor understands that undermining this risks the politicisation of the public service.

Labor will consult with public servants around significant changes that will impact on their worklife and we will continue to encourage improved engagement between management and the public service in dealing with the challenges that we share.

There is no current intent to undertake a further restructure of Government departments. No restructure will be undertaken by Labor without discussion with employee representatives and the community on its merits. This includes the provision of any information available on why such a restructure is necessary and the impacts that it will have.

Innovation

There is no doubt that the opportunities afforded by the technological advancement, in particular the roll out of the National Broadband Network have the potential to improve services and change the way we work.

Labor will unleash the potential for innovation in Government through an active partnership with public servants and communities. This will deliver opportunities for changing the way work is undertaken and the way that services are delivered as well as improving the capacity for more flexible work environments that account for the needs of Tasmanian workers.

Governance

Labor opposed WorkChoices and will continue to oppose any industrial relations approach which undermines the rights and conditions of Tasmanian workers.

Labor will retain a state industrial relations system that covers all public sector workers. Any alternate proposal will only be considered following extensive consultation with employees and their representatives.

Labor believes in fairness for workers and due process in managing conflicts and issues in workplaces. Labor will continue to support an independent and adequately resourced process for public sector workers to review decisions that affect them.

Labor recognises that improving flexibility to allow public servants to move between roles and contribute their skills in different ways across Government will improve career outcomes and worker satisfaction as well as supporting better service outcomes for the community. The standardisation and alignment of the key State Service Awards was a significant step to facilitate movement between different occupational groups and duties. Labor will work with unions as to further improvements can be achieved.

Work undertaken by the Demographic Change Advisory Council underpins the need to deal with emerging skills shortages. There is not one simple solution to this problem.

Tasmania needs improvement in the post-compulsory education through greater flexibility of learning opportunities. We will benefit from partnerships with the University of Tasmania to deliver courses that will meet the needs of the Tasmanian community into the future. Labor will build on the growing reputation of the Tasmanian Government agencies as employers of choice by delivering competitive wages and conditions as well as supporting innovation to manage life-work balance through flexible approaches to employment.

Labor will continue to ensure that recruitment and employment systems will deliver a workforce that reflects the community it serves. Support for diversity is a cornerstone of Labor's approach over the last decade.

The Bartlett Labor Government will continue to work together with the CPSU with energy and creativity to meet the challenges that lay ahead and grab hold of worthwhile opportunities that emerge for Tasmania.

I look forward to ongoing discussion with the CPSU as we move towards the 2010 election.

Yours faithfully

Brenton Best MP