

Question – 05.02.2009

ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGE

Mr BROCK (Frome) (14:38): My question is to the Minister for Education. Following the Premier's announcement yesterday of the federal nation building and jobs plan, the funding given to educational facilities across Australia and South Australia from the Prime Minister, will the minister advise me what projects and funds, if any, will be allocated to the electorate of Frome for educational buildings and also school buses?

The Hon. J.D. LOMAX-SMITH (Adelaide—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Minister for Tourism, Minister for the City of Adelaide) (14:39): I thank the member for Frome for his question and I congratulate him on his great victory. I say that we all look forward to working with him. He follows in the footsteps of a very good member for Frome, and I am sure he will emulate his achievements in the future. I congratulate him.

The question the honourable member asks relates to a premise with which some members on that side of the chamber might disagree. I know the opposition federally is opposed to the stimulus that would see money flow into all primary schools and many public schools. I think this is a very significant investment. The Premier has had a very deep involvement in supporting this initiative and has given a commitment that we will be able to roll out these developments across the state quickly. Certainly, the announcement by the Prime Minister on 2 February of a \$14.7 billion school investment and employment boost will be welcomed, not just in the city but across the state, particularly in the seat of Frome.

The funds will build or upgrade large scale infrastructure, such as libraries and halls, in every primary school, special school and R-12 school. It will build 500 new science laboratories and language learning centres in schools that can demonstrate need and provide up to \$200,000 to every Australian school for maintenance and renewal of school buildings.

When the Premier discussed this matter with the Prime Minister, he made it clear that we would be able to start work on the ground and stimulate employment rapidly. That is why in relation to many of the matters under discussion design work has been done and feasibility studies have been carried out. These will be projects that can roll forward. Of course, they are not projects on which money has been committed already by the state government. There is a premise within this, and one on which we have given a commitment to the Prime Minister, that we will not be cost shifting in any way and that we will continue to spend our funds—as we did before—on capital works.

Whilst funding going to the schools in Frome has been allocated for specific purposes, with \$1.3 billion across the country being earmarked for maintenance in schools and the rest for other major projects, there will be no funding within the guidelines for school buses. However, the state government last year bought 14 new school buses, and almost 50 per cent of our school bus fleet is now air conditioned and seatbelted. We will continue to use our capital works funds in that area.

The Premier and I have already sent out letters to school councils and principals, requesting that they think seriously about this great opportunity. I think \$14.7 billion is a huge amount across the nation, and South Australia will benefit by about \$1 billion. It will be spread pro rata across the schools. Schools will not be disadvantaged because of their location, but the bulk of the money in this tranche will go initially to primary schools.

We have asked local schools and school councils in Frome to look at their maintenance lists and projects that are in the pipeline in order to agree that they are their favoured projects. Preferably, we would like to use projects on which significant work has been done already so that we can start work on the ground almost immediately.

One of the other issues that will benefit Frome is that we will be building on the model of our School Pride initiative, which allowed us to have local work done. We will be putting out that money without red tape. Obviously, there will be probity issues, but the money will flow to the regions and local employment will be encouraged as much as possible where local

tradesmen can do the work. This will provide employment as well as funds to local communities. Already the government in South Australia over seven years has invested \$790 million—

Mr Williams interjecting:

The SPEAKER: Order, the member for MacKillop!

The Hon. J.D. LOMAX-SMITH: —in upgrading infrastructure. For instance, I know a gymnasium worth \$1.38 million has been built at Clare High School, \$100,000 was spent in Georgetown Primary School on asphalt replacement and \$15,000 was spent in Airdale Primary School. We have very good asset management and a list of required works. I am hoping that, if the honourable member's schools agree that the list we have is the list they want dealt with, we can fast track those developments. We will work with the honourable member in any way we can to ensure that his electorate benefits.