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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

**Government Spending**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 21 October 2009**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Dr EMERSON** (Rankin—Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs) (4.03 pm)—What a dreary, tired speech from the shadow Assistant Treasurer. People talk about governments getting tired, but here we are not even two years into this parliament and we have a tired opposition. The member for Casey is one of the younger members of the opposition—he was born in 1967. You would think that he would at least fire up. We know there are some more senior citizens in the opposition, but I would have thought that one of the younger members of the opposition would have a little bit of energy and be able to make some compelling arguments. Instead, when he finishes his speech he gets one tired ‘Hear, hear!’ from the member for Groom.

I want to go to the last part of his contribution today because the first part of his contribution was just a rerun of what—

**Mrs Hull**—What were you yesterday? Danger, danger: Will Robinson approaching!

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)**—Danger, danger, the member for Riverina!

**Dr EMERSON**—the coalition said after the last budget. There was nothing new in that, just the same tired old rhetoric, but the shadow Assistant Treasurer did make some claims in relation to taxes to which I would like to respond. He asserted that Labor is always the party of higher taxes and higher tax rates.

*Mr Dutton interjecting—*

**Dr EMERSON**—And here we have the member for Dickson—or I think he is the member for Dickson. He is the current member and, as long as no opportunities arise in Fairfax or Fisher, he will probably confirm that he will be running again for Dickson. Why? Because his options are completely exhausted.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**—Order!

**Dr EMERSON**—Let’s be clear: if he had any option at all he would take it. He would run away—cut and run out of Dickson—but he has run out of options because

the LNP has absolutely framed him. He was described yesterday in the *Gold Coast Bulletin* as ‘the Liberal Party’s poster boy’. Well, a poster boy has just been framed by the Liberal National Party.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I refer you to Budget Paper No. 1 of 2009-10. It shows a historic record of taxes as a share of GDP. I can report that the coalition was the highest taxing government in Australia’s history. Let me repeat that the coalition was the highest taxing government in Australia’s history. The member was talking about misrepresentation. Madam Deputy Speaker, let me take you through the basic figures. In 2000-01, taxation was 24.7 per cent of GDP. In 2002-03 it was 24.6 per cent; in 2003-04 it was 24.5 per cent; in 2004-05 and 2005-06 it was 24.9 per cent; and in 2006-07 and 2007-08 it was 24.6 per cent. So 24 point something high like six, seven, eight or nine is the coalition’s record.

The highest level it ever went to under the previous Labor government was 23.8 per cent, proving conclusively that the coalition is the highest taxing government in Australia’s history. Then the shadow Assistant Treasurer went to the argument of high marginal tax rates. The fact is that when Labor came to office in 1983 the top marginal tax rate was 60 per cent, gifted to the Australian people by the Fraser government whose Treasurer was none other than John Howard. It was a Labor government which reduced the top marginal tax rate from 60 per cent to 49 per cent and further subsequently. So, on both counts of the shadow Assistant Treasurer asserting that Labor is the party of high taxes, he is wrong. The coalition is the party of high taxes.

It is very interesting to go through the whole episode of the stimulus package and the efforts to which this government has gone to support working families in Australia and to support small businesses in Australia. We acted early and we acted decisively to support jobs and to support small businesses. As a consequence of that, we have the strongest growth in the developed world. We are the only country of the major advanced countries that did not go into recession. I say that is good news for working people and that is good news for small businesses. I think that is something of which we can be proud. Indeed, the small business community itself recognises this. The Sensis survey of September 2009 says:

Business confidence among SMEs rebounded during the past quarter recording the strongest rise since the inception of the Sensis® Business Index more than 16 years ago, rising some 20 percentage points during the quarter.

It goes on to say:

This quarter's strong improvement brought confidence to its highest level since August 2007, before economic conditions started to decline.

And finally:

Support for the Federal Government rose strongly, with small businesses remaining strongly supportive of the economic stimulus package and efforts to get the economy going.

There is the small business community speaking out in support of the stimulus package and yet we have the shadow Assistant Treasurer saying that the stimulus package is too big and that perhaps it should not have occurred at all. What would happen to small business in this country either if the stimulus package had not proceeded—because it is hard to pin those opposite down on exactly their view as to whether or not there should have been any stimulus—or if, indeed, the stimulus was now withdrawn, which is what the shadow Assistant Treasurer just argued?

The consequence of that for working people in this country would be that 100,000 more Australians would have their jobs at risk and small business would be smashed by the reckless, irresponsible policy prescriptions of the coalition saying that the stimulus should be now withdrawn. The fact is that this is nothing more than rank political opportunism on the part of the coalition. They have their self-interests, their personal interests, ahead of the national interests, ahead of the interests of the working people of this country and ahead of the interests of small business people of this country.

*Mr Ciobo interjecting—*

**Dr EMERSON**—The member for Moncrieff is a serial interjector in this debate. I will be fascinated to know whether the member for Moncrieff, the shadow small business minister, will make a contribution to this debate which has been initiated by the shadow Assistant Treasurer. The matter of public importance actually refers to the impact on families and small businesses. I look forward to the contribution of the member for Moncrieff. The Gold Coast is small business central. If ever there was a place that was reliant on small businesses and their success it is the Gold Coast, yet this is the man who fell like a stone, who plummeted like a stone, down to 93 and who fell out of the top 100 with the member for Forde rating well above him. He is joined, of course, by the member for Dickson, who went scurrying back to Dickson when

he was knocked over by Karen Andrews. That is where the poster boy was framed because the member for McPherson said: 'Come in spinner. Come down to the Gold Coast; I'll secure the seat for you.' Of course, the member for McPherson went on holidays. He made no phone calls, he missed out, he got framed and now he is back in Dickson saying, 'The real reason I went back to Dickson is that I got 400 emails saying "Please come back to Dickson."' "Give us a break. I predict—there is a very good chance—the shadow small business minister will make no contribution to this debate today, but we will see. He still has time to make a contribution. But the fact is that this is an opportunistic opposition. They put their personal interests, their self-interests, ahead of the interests of working families and ahead of the interests of the small businesses of this country. On debt and deficit, they are doing nothing more than running a dishonest scare campaign. Australia has the lowest debt and the lowest deficit of any country in the advanced world.

**Mr Anthony Smith**—Why is that?

**Dr EMERSON**—Let us just acknowledge, for a start, that we have the lowest deficit and the lowest debt of any advanced country, and you are going around with a dishonest scare campaign. What we need to know from the opposition is whether they support any stimulus and whether they ever supported any stimulus. Of course, Malcolm Turnbull, the Leader of the Opposition, said at the outset that the cash payments in December of last year were 'right' and he was 'not going to quibble about them'. The next day he started the quibbling, he started condemning them and he said, 'This is a cash splash; this is a waste of money.' But, when the retail sales figures came in showing that we had the strongest retail sales of any country in the developed world, he started to change his tune. Indeed, small business retail sales grew more strongly than the average overall. So the cash payments were very good for small business.

Then the opposition leader changed his tune and said, 'This is not going to create one job.' First it was about right, then he said it was too much and then he said it was ineffective. Now they are again saying that it is too much. They are all over the place on this. They do their internal polling to see if they can strike some sort of chord with the Australian people. There is no consistency. They will never strike a chord with the Australian people when they put their self-interest first ahead of the national interest and ahead of the interests of working Australians and small businesses in this country.

Let us have a quick look at the coalition economic team, which has every possible position on an economic argument, depending on the opportunity of the moment. The chief opportunist, the opposition leader, puts his own self-interest before the national

interest and shows exceptionally poor judgment. Just go to the fake email affair and you will understand what poor judgment he has. How could you entrust economic policy to the Leader of the Opposition? Then there is the shadow Treasurer, who said that jobs are not his top priority. They were running around saying, 'Jobs, jobs, jobs: that is what we are really concerned about.' Then at the first opportunity to change tack, the shadow Treasurer said, 'No, jobs are not my top priority.' There is no consistency from the shadow Treasurer at all. Instead of focusing on supporting the jobs of Australian workers during the global recession, he was more interested in focusing on his own job. He said on ABC radio in Melbourne, 'The jobs we have to focus on—

**Mr Anthony Smith**—This sounds as though you are reading a script.

**Dr EMERSON**—Indeed; it is a transcript. He said, 'The jobs we have to focus on are our own jobs at the moment and in my case the job that I want is Wayne Swan's job.' How about that? That is from the shadow Treasury. The only jobs that he is interested in are not the jobs of working Australians and not the jobs in small businesses but his own and Wayne Swan's job. How crass is that? Then he says that he is not even qualified enough to understand unemployment forecasts. He was asked to comment on the unemployment forecast during the crisis and he said to Leigh Sales, 'Well, Leigh, you're asking me to look into numbers that I'm not qualified to look into.' He is not qualified? That is the truth: the shadow Treasurer is not qualified to run the Treasury of this country and the economic policy of this country.

**Mr Ciobo**—Nor is Swannie.

**Dr EMERSON**—Right on cue, the shadow spokesman on small business comes in. I cannot wait for his contribution to this debate. He has dropped out of the top 100. It is 510 days today since he last asked me a question in this parliament.

Who else have we got in this economic team? We have the Leader of the National Party, who would be the Deputy Prime Minister of Australia. There was a poll conducted on the Leader of the National Party and also on the Leader of the National Party in the Senate, Barnaby Joyce, and some other National Party identities. They could not find him. No-one knew who the Leader of the National Party was. They dispatched the CSI team to look for a little bit of evidence of his existence; a little bit of DNA here or there. But there was no sign of him. He disappeared without a trace. Anthony LaPaglia could not find him. The CSI team was looking for him. 'Who is he? Who? No, I don't know him.' I have a bit of advice for the Leader of the National Party. He should change his name by deed

poll to 'Don't Know'. If he changed his name by deed poll to 'Don't Know' then his recognition would go up fourfold, because that was the most popular choice in that poll: 'Who is the Leader of the National Party? Don't know.'

People do not know who the Leader of the National Party is and they do not know what the coalition stands for. It is all over the place. It is completely opportunistic. The Liberal Party once presented itself as the party of small business, who Bob Menzies described as the forgotten people. Well, you have forgotten small business. You have betrayed small business. It is only through the active and determined support of the Rudd Labor government that small business has a fighting chance in this country to get through the economic downturn. You should be ashamed of yourselves. (*Time expired*)