NORTHERN TERRITORY
of AUSTRALIA

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

BUDGET THAT FAILS TERRITORIANS PART 1

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There is nothing big for my region in Big Rivers nor my electorate of Arnhem, but that is because the CLP is malicious and small-minded and wants to punish the people of Arnhem because they have a Labor member representing and speaking up for them.

Mrs Hersey: The upgrades at Maude Creek.

Ms UIBO: Yes, Maude Creek, that is one of the smallest rivers, and I said I supported the Member for Katherine in some of her work. Once again, it is maintenance work. That bridge is already there, the road is already sealed, how about we get off the track. The Member for Barkly is probably the only one who actually travels out bush. Why not go and listen to him and understand the importance of our road network, infrastructure planning and, I may be too optimistic, but next year the budget paper will be thicker with infrastructure planning. In fact, I double checked I had the right booklet.

I am flabbergasted that the CLP members are trying to spin their maintenance budget as the language they are now using, 'A budget for everyday Territorians'. Who are those everyday Territorians are and what the criteria is they should be looking for. That is new and being developed by the government, and it has been their vision because I am desperate to see where there is something which will grow the Territory's economy. Where will we see the growth of jobs supporting those sectors.

In the short time I have remaining—I know CLP members love to blame the former Labor government over eight years of mess; they love taking credit for the things we did well. It is as if the eight years did not exist. Without taking accountability or responsibility for their abysmal budget, they start playing the blame game. They are almost bipolar in the sense of presenting what is good and bad for the Territory, and they love taking credit for some of the successful Labor projects and infrastructure, which were started, costed and planned, but which were delivered in the CLP's timeframes.

I commend my motion to the Assembly.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, this motion is entitled 'A Budget that Fails Territorians'. Specifically, the motion contends that the Assembly condemns the CLP Finocchiaro government for delivering a budget that 'completely fails Territorians'. Delivering four things is the claim: one, no real cost-of-living relief; two, no pipeline of infrastructure works; three, no plan to support the growth and prosperity of critical job-creating sectors; and four, no economic vision for the future of the Northern Territory.

That is a subjective claim, the idea that this budget completely fails Territorians, but it can be fairly quickly objectively dispensed with. Prima facie, the reality of it is that we are providing cost-of-living relief measures, as there is $290m or something in there. There is extra, indeed.

No pipeline of infrastructure works—again, that is just hyperbole. There is mention of exhaustive infrastructure works, and the Leader of the Opposition has just pointed out at great length everything articulated in Budget Paper No 4, so once again that is flat out wrong.

No plan to support the growth and prosperity of critical job-creating sectors—I think you will find, again if you go through the actual papers, there is extensive reference to the five sectors that we, as a government, have been focused on from the beginning and continue to be focused on.

Finally, the most generic charge, that there is no economic vision for the future of the Northern Territory. That is a fair enough claim. That is a philosophical argument that you are making, and that is a philosophical argument that I think is worth debating. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the opportunity to discuss it.

As rightfully pointed out, it is unusual to have the opportunity to discuss budgetary matters in the middle of a discussion of an Appropriation Bill. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for affording the Assembly—with her precious time on General Business day—the opportunity for us to zoom out and think more broadly about budgets beyond critiquing just the virtues of specific commitments. To think abouts budget, success and failure, indeed, is a useful exercise for us all, noting that we have precious time when giving budget speeches to talk about the nuts and bolts of what might be happening in or for our electorates.

Let me begin by saying budget time is always a complex time of the year for me. It is no secret that I have a lot of opinions about our economic affairs. This time last year I deliberately chose to abstain from providing economic commentary in May, because I did not want to provide mixed messages in any form, and it was for the Treasurer to articulate a message and a vision for the Northern Territory CLP Finocchiaro government. That is precisely what he did last year.

I am delighted this year to have the opportunity to get behind my learned colleague, Treasurer Yan, in support of this budget. I find it remarkable that people would make a claim that this budget has no economic vision. On the contrary, what it has is—for the first time in a decade—some semblance of logical consistency. It is actually a coherent budget, not a fantastical wish list of *Utopia*-esque nonsense. It is a continuation of last year's budget, consistent with the priorities that government has articulated from day one.

Here is the rub of it. You may not like those priorities. You may not like the prescription for how we are trying to rebuild the economy, reduce crime and restore lifestyle, but it is unfair to suggest that the budget has no vision and that it is a maintenance budget. Do you know what it is? Not a maintenance budget, but an honest budget. It is the first one in donkey's years that makes any sense, where the gap between Budget Paper No 1 and Budget Papers No 2 to 6 is not total fantasy. That is the reality of what we are dealing with for a change.

Isn't it a crying shame for the opposition that we cannot just keep on milking from the magic money tree to keep announcing what is new, special and razzle-dazzle with this budget? That is not how budgets work. That is why we are tens of billions of dollars in debt, because it is the former Labor government which had not real economic nous and demonstrated over a long period that it thought budgeting just meant spending money.

Budgeting is about institutionally saving money, stopping the wastage of money and figuring out how to make money as well. That is where the former Labor governments have failed us.

This budget is logically consistent, coherent and bridges the gap between budgetary rhetoric and reality for the first time a decade. I will return to that concept of the gap between rhetoric and reality substantively and exhaustively soon.

First, notwithstanding the fact that this is a discussion, not about budget 2026–27 but about the higher order arguments. It behoves us to consider some of the remarks that have been made in relation to this budget, noting that the motion is titled 'A budget that fails Territorians'. To contextualise both the motion and subsequent contributions that will come in the ensuing debate, what we have heard so far is this budget is a no plan no future maintenance budget. I do not think so. I think you will find that anyone with a serious economic or accounting head—or any basic financial acumen for that matter—would recognise that there is a much shorter gap between Budget Paper 1 and Budget Papers 2 to 6 in this set of budget papers than in any of the papers for the preceding decade.

No direct relief for cost-of-living pressure—again, just a prima facie role. Missed opportunity—those are pretty rich words considering a decade of wasted opportunity in terms of repositioning our fiscal and financial affairs.

It is pretty ridiculous to say things like lacklustre and visionless. What we have is a plan that we are sticking to. I am sorry it is not a fun-time plan, where we keep reinventing new nonsensical things that never manifest in reality. It is a real plan, and it is a tragedy that there are not more members around to hear about that concrete plan at the moment.

Housing stress is something that was reflected on in generic terms. Seriously, whose fault is that? Where is the housing that was meant to be created over a pipeline of delivery over the last decade? We have to start getting a grip on reality in relation to some of the debates we have here, particularly on economic affairs where we demonstrate disgraceful lack of subject matter understanding, let alone expertise.

My favourite one is population growth is stalling. Oh, my God! I cannot have this conversation again. I do not know how many times I have to explain it in this place. The bottom line is we are stabilising the population situation which the former government was tanking. I could go through these numbers again and again, but I will just be referencing old speeches and wasting precious time in which I want to be talking of other things today.

The bottom line is we are stabilising population growth in and around 1.1%, which I do not think is great, and we can do a whole lot better. I imagine we will. However, the former Labor government, in the last four quarters before we took over office, quarter on quarter was dropping under 1% population growth year on year. We were down to 0.7% year on year population growth in the last quarter of data available before we took over. How many times and how many ways do we have to explain this?

Budgets are about more than spending. The Leader of the Opposition clearly does not understand the basics in that regard. Do you know what? Thank goodness the cavalry from Nightcliff is rolling in! That fellow can apparently count. I think he is an engineer by trade. I am waiting in earnest to hear the Member for Nightcliff's

contribution because, Lord help us if he does not provide something on the literacy and numeracy front from the opposition benches.

Razor cuts is not helpful language. That kind of rhetoric is dragging down the quality of debate and the understanding of the issues. Show me 'razor cuts' in this budget. Why is that kind of language being bandied about again? It is for dumb political gains. It is ridiculous.

'Capitalising on windfalls' is another one. It is the pot calling the kettle black. The entire last eight years' worth of Labor budgets were essentially saved by the grace of accounting adjustments and GST recalculations from the federal government. Labor did not make any money in any of that time.

More prison cells—yes, 100% you got us. We are building more prison cells or at least trying to allocate money to figure out how to build more prison cells because, like it or not, we need more prison cells. We probably need a whole lot of other things as well to get to the root causes of crime and to rebuild our society and economy, but now $15m to start thinking about how to sensibly plan new men's and women's prisons is not a bad investment. Here is the rub of it: it is what should have been done and what was purported to have been done by former Labor governments. Yes, you got us; we are interested in building new correctional facilities so that people are not sleeping like sardines in watch houses.

I cannot talk about the delivery of major projects again; I have done too many of these. Even a broken clock is right twice a day, so, sure, a couple of the Labor projects in the major projects—the portfolio of 75 major turkeys—came good, but I think we can all safely say that the majority of those were fantastical promises on paper and had little substantively to support them.

The clear plans for land release is another one. What did the former Labor government do with its own Bringing Land to Market report? What happened to all the work that Dick Guit did? I mean, we are reinventing the wheel year on year, and it is part of the reason why the Northern Territory cannot economically emancipate itself.

The new hospital—hollow criticisms and no actionable solutions from the other side. That is the thing. I will say this without bringing another debate into it: at least there are some members of this Assembly who are offering alternative economic ideas. Some of them I think are not grounded in economic reality and mostly involve fairy dust and organic vegetable collectives; however, at least they are new ideas. The fact is that from the actual opposition benches, I am yet to hear a single economic idea of any worth or credibility in relation to how we grow the economy, grow demographically and create sustainable opportunities for people. It is just more of the same—spend more, spend on things that we spent on and keep spending on; ask for more money because more money will fix the problem.

More money will not fix the problem. That is why this is a budget grounded in reality. The Treasurer had to do actual hard work and say, 'I cannot overnight redress all our debt proposition, but what I will at least slow down the rate at which we are accumulating debt'. That is a laudable objective because you cannot pull a hard handbrake and crash the economy and society and remove the entirety of the bloated public sector. That is not what we are seeking to do. We are trying to reprioritise frontline workers, get rid of back-office staff and create a more efficient and productive economy over time. It starts with turning around a massive barge at this point, and I do not envy the task the Treasurer has in that regard. I think he is not getting a fair shake. I do not think the critique coming from the other side is fair in that regard in relation to explaining our budget position.

The narrative that we will lose—insert key worker, healthcare worker, nurse or whoever it might be—and the suggestion that former Labor governments over three lots of leadership had any idea how to attract or retain population are laughable. Stop talking about it until you come up with a better set of ideas. Seriously, stop talking about it; you are embarrassing yourselves.

Lectures on education from ministers who presided over the systemic decline of public education offerings in the Northern Territory are unbelievable. It is shameful. I think our minister for Education is giving it a right royal crack. She freely admits that she is not a teacher and does not have an education background, but she believes that everybody should have access to opportunity and is doing her level best to try new ways to make it happen.

The focus is on fundamentals, which is what we have to go back to at a time when our public schools are obviously empirically not doing as well as they were in the past, despite the heroic efforts of educators.

Labor's economic model over the last decade speaks for itself. There were half-hearted signals to market on how to make money and begging the Commonwealth for more. How is that plan going for you? The reality is that trying to get resources out of the ground and attract private investment as fast as possible and hoping that the Commonwealth will work with us and is generous, is not new; we are doing the same as what those opposite did. We are all trying to do it more efficiently and productively, but that will not happen overnight.

In the meantime, we are in charge of managing our economic affairs. That means not just spending money but also having a vision and a plan for how we utilise our funding, stop wastage and position ourselves to be a more attractive investment proposition. That is what my learned colleague's budget does.

I am sorry, but some of you need to be better tooled up on understanding what a budget is, how it works, what can be done and what cannot be done. It is not just about spending or asking for more. Cherrypicking singular commitments to try to make a case is just weak. For example, the case this morning that the only growth sector is correctional services is rich coming from three lots of governments that presided over unconstrained public sector growth which was disinhibited and cannibalised the prospect of private sector growth in the Northern Territory. That is the reality of it. Everyone here knows it, and it is time to face up to it.

My learned colleague and the Minister for Public Service are facing up to it. That is what we are doing. We are paying our wages bill without putting it all on credit for once. We are trying to prioritise frontline services. We are trying in earnest to start turning around our wages bill, which is the single-biggest drain on our finances.

'The Treasurer has delivered an underwhelming budget'—I am sorry that it is not razzle-dazzle and fireworks enough for you. Maybe if we spent another $15bn it would be exciting, but that is not what we will do. We will keep chipping away and trying to slow down the rate at which we waste and speed up the rate at which we improve productivity and growth. That will take time.

In the short run it means that state final demand might not look as sexy as you want it to look. Here is a hot tip: do some research and look at the other periods of state final demand when it has been negative in the Northern Territory's growth cycle. We are not hiding those figures; we are just not trumpeting them from the rooftops because at the moment they are not that exciting to talk about. We expect them to improve. The forward estimates indicate that they will improve. There is an economic cycle to these things that suggests they will improve.

An economist called Alfred E. Kahn in 1966 wrote a paper that was influential called 'The Tyranny of Small Decisions: Market Failures, Imperfections, and the Limits of Economics'. I will not go into it exhaustively, but the bottom line is that it builds the case for how individual small choices and transactions cumulatively delivered unintended large undesirable or suboptimal outcomes.

That is kind of what happened over eight years of Labor management of our books. I do not think it was necessarily maliciously negligent in intent; it was more ineptitude than malice that got us to where we are going to. You can divide that period—that epoch—into three rough zones. There was 2017 to 2019, which we will generously call aspirational budgeting. From 2020 to 2022 there was, frankly speaking, fairly insubstantial budgeting. Then in the last phase of 2023 to 2024 there was let us generously call it exigent budgeting—trying to save the furniture before you get turfed out.

It is a great opportunity for us today to think about those three epochs because they teach us a lot. In a nutshell, they show us that the Territory Labor governments, three times over, which held power from 2016 to 2024, presided over a period that was characterised by significant fiscal volatility and the growing disconnect between—as I began my speech—budgetary rhetoric and economic reality and outcomes.

Whilst budget speeches emphasise budget repair and jobs of the future, what the actual data revealed was a deepening reliance on federal GST transfers and a burgeoning debt profile. Here they are; eight years of budget speeches. Here is the one we are not allowed to talk about today. I will not talk about it. I will come back and talk about how awesome that one is later.

Let us talk about what is wrong with these eight budgets and why we are in the hole we are in now. I will not go through it line by line. What I am doing is pointing out my top 10 indicators of the difference between budgetary rhetoric and economic reality and why we are in the hole we are in now.

The first one is the structural deficit paradox. In 2016 Labor promised to address structural deficit inherited from its previous government, presenting a plan for budget repair—a roadmap to fiscal sustainability. Back

then, you might recall, debt was less than $2m. The reality is that rather than repairing the budget the structural deficit widened.

By 2024 we are projecting fiscal balance deficits through to the end of the decade. The government's inability to align expenditure with its modest revenue base meant that repair was perpetually deferred. That is what happened; they just kept kicking the can down the road.

What my learned colleague has done today—last year not as much as I would have like, but today in this budget—is he is starting to face that harsh reality. It is not much fun getting in front of the media and saying, 'I do not have shiny trinkets and promises for you all, but we are starting to do the work of repair whilst trying not to also gut the place of its last bit of life'.

The second point where there is this massive gap between rhetoric and reality is on actual net debt per capita. Successive Treasurers kept arguing over that period—three of them in a row—that debt was a necessary tool to fund critical infrastructure social services during economic downturns. In short, 'We will spend our way out of the problem, and we have to spend our way out of the problem; it is the only way out of the problem'. That is, in essence, what happened eight times over. Read eight of these in a row, and that is what you find.

In reality, by 2024–25 net debt was projected to reach $12bn, eventually climbing to $14bn by 2029. On a per capita basis, as a result, we were left books where the NT is the most indebted jurisdiction in Australia. That debt to revenue ration, of cited as a measure of sustainability, blew out to beyond 120%, leaving our credit rating extremely vulnerable.

Fortunately, it has stabilised for the present purposes. Again, it is not lazy debate for us to say we were left with a disastrous state of affairs. That is the honest truth; this place was fiscally mismanaged over the last year and possibly a period before that as well. The fact is that is the ship we are trying to turn around at this point.

The third one I alluded to before; this over reliance on GST windfalls. Over those eight years, Labor often framed budgets as a result of 'disciplined financial management'. I am sure we have all heart that one before. The actual budget improvements—the reality of the situation—were almost entirely driven by external factors; specifically higher than expected GST, relativities and pool growth from the Commonwealth.

Without the federal government covering approximately 70% of our revenue and costs, the Territory economy would have been insolvent. The reality is that accounting and GST recalculations, more than anything else, are what created windfalls in this set of eight budgets.

The fourth one I will not go into in detail—the failure to achieve population growth targets. If you go through those budgets you will find reference, particularly in 2018, to the population growth strategy and the laudable objectives to boost the population to 27,000 and then 300,000 by 2030 to secure more GST and drive domestic demand. None of that happened. I can talk about it in forensic detail another time. I will simply say now that, once again, understand that the Territory has struggled with chronic net interstate migration loss. The periods when we had positive interstate migration are when we had correlated with stimulating housing supply, which is one of the things we are trying to do again now.

The Darwin ship lift—I just cannot. The reality of it is it started off as $100m, and it is now $850m. There are so many reasons it should not be what it is now. I freely confess to the fact that I am not privy to enough of the information to make all the assessments and judgments on this, but what is clear—and it is a matter of public—is that the project has become a symbol of infrastructure mismanagement. It has been characterised by significant delay and is now thought of as lacking in transparency regarding its commercial viability. We did not start that process, but we are now trying to deal with that total—I will not use the word I want to use.

The sixth gap between rhetoric and reality is on private investment, and stagnant private investment. I am the one pointing out that private investment is not what it should be here right now. We are having those conversations because we can have a mature discussion about our economic fortunes, but do not think that private investment suddenly collapsed when we came to office. It has essentially been stagnant from 2016 onwards. Each budget speech from that point onwards talks about unlocking private investment through Territory-led projects.

Aside from the Barossa gas project, private investment has basically always been tepid through that period. I will talk about state final demand again, but the bottom line is that over those eight years, today getting on your high horse and saying, 'State final demand is negative now, so what will we do?'—yes, it is at 0.3 now

and it will be at 0.8, and then it will bounce back over the forward estimates and the cycle and will improve again. Suggesting that it was always going gangbusters in the last eight years is pure nonsense.

The failure of projects being revoted is another critical one that we just do not pay enough attention to. What we are talking about here is, basically, each year hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure spending was revoted—that is, pushed to the next year—because projects failed to ever get started or were delayed. This has created this phantom stimulus, where the government gets the headline for the spend without ever actually delivering on the jobs or assets on any proposed timeline.

Contrast that with each one of these, where each time around it is like, 'We are proud to announce record infrastructure this year, record-breaking stimulus to the construction sector'—it is not real. Those promises are just not worth the paper they are written on. That is the bottom line.

Another one that we are on our high horse about in a massive way is the cost of living and the utility price squeeze. Again, go and do the actual work on the numbers and you will see where government has kept claiming to protect Territorians from inflationary pressures by subsidising power and water. In real terms, that is not what happened. In real terms, Darwin remained one of the most expensive places to live in Australia because of a range of structural factors, and the government's decision to maintain high dividends from government-owned corporations like Power and Water arguably, in some ways, helped paper over budget deficits and acted as something of a stealth tax on residents. That is what happened there.

Darwin is an expensive place to live, work and do business. The only way you change that over the longer term is by bringing in more inputs to the system, more capital, more ideas, more labour et cetera. You cannot do that unless you create a more robust investment climate and a place that is more backable. That is why you must do the hard work of ripping off the bandaid and slowly turning around the debt position, signalling to market that we unequivocally back the extractive minerals and gas industry. Only then do you have a fighting chance of creating an investment climate that people want to honour.

Mr YAN: A point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker! Pursuant to Standing Order 43, I move an extension of time for the member to finish his remarks.

Motion agreed to.

Dr RAHMAN: Housing supply and homelessness are the ninth major point of a gap between rhetoric and reality that I want to draw out.

None of us wants to see an absence of housing. Nobody wants there to be homeless people. None of us wants to be punching down on our social services sector, and I do not think that is what we are doing or intending to do in any sort of malicious or nefarious way. Equally, let's not make out like eight years of Labor governments were stately in their pursuit of resolving all these issues.

Significant funding was allocated to remote housing and urban renewal to address NT housing crises over that period, but it was not done in a particularly coordinated robust or reliable fashion. We know that because we are continuing to do the same thing, repeatedly to try to resolve problems that are not intractable but have not been effectively resolved.

The reality is the NT continues to have the highest rate of homelessness per capita in the country. The reality is that waitlists for social housing are stagnant and the private rental market has become increasingly unaffordable, particularly in Darwin and Alice Springs—that is the case. The delivery of remote housing has been plagued by bureaucratic bottlenecks and failing to meet the urgent needs of Indigenous communities.

Again, that is failure to understand economic basics. By way of footnote, when we created Cullen Bay, you are right, not everybody could afford to live in Cullen Bay. Same as right now, not everybody can afford a $750,000 house with a $50,000 home grant, but the knock-on effect of creating Cullen Bay is that you create headroom in the market for people to move out of Fannie Bay into Cullen Bay, and for people to move from adjacent suburbs and so on and so forth—you get the point here.

You have to create supply, and you have to do it where it is economically viable. I will not talk about the budget or the specifics today, but once again more of those $50,000 grants are happening in Northcrest, in the electorate of Fong Lim, where houses are being built and people are taking up the option than anywhere else. Those people who move into those suburbs are coming from the northern suburbs, by and large, which creates capacity in the northern suburbs; not necessarily social and affordable housing, not necessarily *Utopia*-esque solutions, but that is what you do. You must create more supply.

I was not fully in love with the plans we had for generating supply. I would do some of these things slightly differently, but the fact is we are doing something that is demonstrating results. It is working. There is large uptake. The uptake has slowed down in some regards, and it may slow down some more, but either way we are building new houses. Existing people are moving into them, and it creates more houses for other people to move into.

You cannot start with social and affordable housing all the time. We are doing work on HAFF round 3. Once again, where was the work being done by the last government on making sure we had enough HAFF money to fill in holes in the ground? My favourite hole in the ground—and it breaks my heart because I am powerless to do anything about it; it is so buggered at this point—is Shiers Street. The last Labor government knocked over all that social and affordable housing, promised to put something in that gap and now there is a giant bloody hole in the Narrows that I cannot do anything about in the short term. It is because of the failure of long-term planning of the last Labor government. They should have acquired the planning, approvals and the funding to replace like-for-like in that space. Instead, you have people in the Narrows going when will we see something other than just bare grass out here.

Finally, and probably the most important one, public service bracket creep. The government in 2019 announced a hiring freeze and efficiency dividends to curb public sector costs. The reality is that employee expenses continue to be the largest single drain on the budget and by 2024 our public service had grown so significantly—also remembering all this crazy consultant spending that we were doing that we have reined in—that has created a rigid bucket, when nearly every dollar we have in revenue gets tied up in wages leaving little room for the strategic economic pivots that keep being promised in budget speeches repeatedly.

Just a quick recap. Budget rhetoric, actual reality, net debt, logic about manageable sustainable—no, we are the highest per capita in Australia. GST reliance: we are working in strategic partnership—no, we are 70% vulnerable on the Commonwealth. The ship lift: $100m, $850m—go figure.

Population: 275 by 2030—no, chronic into net negative interstate migration loss. Infrastructure and Budget Paper 4, apparently a favourite one: the favourite hobbyhorse of the Leader of the Opposition. Record delivery—here are eight lots of record delivery. Massive revotes is what she got, and project delays.

The fact is the Territory Labor period was defined by a transition from aspirational planning to crisis management in budgeting. That is what it was, where the reality of the NT small volatile economy eventually caught up with their high-spending rhetoric. Once again, I am sorry that my learned colleague's budget is too maintenance for you. It is a sincere, honest attempt to start bringing fiscal integrity back to our budgeting and to signal to the market that this is a place that is trying to grow sustainably and is prioritising a coherent narrative: make the place safer for everybody first.

It is a record spend on correctional services, crime and police. I will give you this for free: everyone knows I am much of a social conservative, but I am the most fiscally conservative guy in this building. I would have us be much tougher on fiscal discipline, but the Treasurer has made a call and balanced it. We are all behind it, and it is a sensible way forward.

To suggest there is no logic to it, economic vision or narrative—no. Here is the vision: make the place safe; make communities want to stay here; and make it easier for people to do business here without worrying about their businesses getting smashed to bits. That is the narrative from the top down, from the woman who has been here for 5,000 days and her team surrounding her. Those of us who have been here for five minutes are happy to get behind it and give it a go, because the fact of the matter is, what happened over the majority of those 5,000 days was not compelling in terms of delivering an actual return, socially or economically, for the people of the Northern Territory.

Borrowing to pay the bills is not something that we just pointed out today; in 2018 Labor's own Langoulant report was scathing in its reality check about frontline services, population stagnation and the $12bn Boundless Possible nonsense, which was nothing more than a marketing campaign, not a strategy for population growth. We are actually tackling that issue.

Education—record spending versus bottom decile outcomes. Once again, despite having the highest per-student funding in Australia, the NT's educational outcomes are the worst. We are actually facing that reality and trying to turn that around, working under the auspices of the minister for Education.

Regarding public sector growth, non-frontline bureaucracy grew significantly. We know it did—do not pretend it did not—and we are trying now to prioritise frontline workers.

The budget speeches talked about rising costs and affordable housing. You need to look at what happened with CPI over that period and understand that our CPI often outpaced national averages and as a result we still have the same systemic problems in housing that will take longer to turn around and yes, will take cooperation with the federal government. If you would like to help us with that, it would be fantastic. If you just want to throw stones and be unconstructive, stay out of it.

I will not get into it in detail, but the bottom line is that the speculative industry fiascos that we pursued over eight years—rocket launches and amphibious aircraft—is the reality of what diversification looked like under the former government. That diversification resulted in spend on consultants, overseas travel and project management costs for negligible return on investment. It essentially demonstrated to market we were commercially incompetent and will risk taxpayer equity on high-stake ventures, when core infrastructure like roads—which we all want to see fixed—were deprioritised.

The fact is state final demand will turn around, but it is not what we would like it to be. It is not a case of, 'It is not our fault'. I am saying it is the reality of what we inherited, and I explained that at length today, because I think it is important to finally get on the record that it is not our fault. We inherited a lot of these structural problems because of poor, negligent, incompetent decision-making.

Our state final demand always goes down after periods of construction of major projects. It happened post-Ichthys and post-COVID. There is a downturn now that we can see is happening.

The bottom line is that the Labor government can get a participation award for its efforts, but it failed economically on budgets. The irony is that this is the first budget in donkey's years, in a decade, where we are not failing Territorians and are finally being honest with them about the state of our finances and about a way forward.

On the basis of all of that I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the opportunity to flesh this all out in detail, because it will be extremely useful for all of us going forward so we stop wasting time peddling fantasies about what Labor did in its eight years of managing our economy.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Mr Deputy Speaker, every time I come here, I talk about investing in remote regions to stop people from coming in for services. Instead, they should be out in their communities receiving that service, such as the MVR and health services, which would create jobs out there.

When I look at the budget, I do not see anything specific except funding to boost internet services in some communities and some money for Kakadu. I have the fourth biggest electorate. There is nothing specific about Maningrida, and the Gunbalanya health clinic is out the door. I have asked members on the other side to come and look at the clinic, because it is not fit for purpose. It was just the building the community chose to use as a clinic back in the 1980s. Right now, it is falling apart and crumbling. There is money to restructure it and put some safety measures in place just to make it work, but they need a new clinic out there.

We just want to see a clear plan for our remote communities and regional hubs. I have looked at the budget as fast as I can, and I will look at it at the weekend, but it is more about punishing instead of preventing in the judiciary space. I heard the Member for Fong Lim say, 'We need more prison cells', but arresting the person is not addressing the root of the problem.

It is like the last quarter in a footy game, because he has all these things going wrong in the first and second quarter: poverty; homelessness; stealing. In the last quarter he is arrested and going to jail. I do not see any funding into preventative measures that we need. We need services out there to keep people on the straight and narrow, but instead we are funding the end of it. The people are just getting arrested and thrown into jail, without a clear pathway out of it.

In the education and training sector, the budget does not deliver for students, families, or teachers in the communities. Everything that is in the existing settings, it is still in that pathway. For our remote communities we need extra. We have the worst chronic illness, homelessness and overcrowding issues. We need to throw extra money at these sectors of the community so that it does not compound and people do not jump on cars or planes to come in with their families and spread out into the carparks and bus stops, making everyone unsafe.

If we could look at funding some of these services in these communities, especially big communities like Maningrida, Port Keats, Bathurst Island and Wurrumiyanga. Having an MVR or health clinic is what keeps people in their community. Then they will only come in for the Show—which is coming up—then go back home.