

WASTE WATCH COMMITTEE DEBATE – COUNCIL MEETING TUESDAY 27th MAY 2008

Chairperson: Further debate, Councillor FLESSER.

Councillor FLESSER: Thank you Madam Chair. I knew you'd be disappointed if I didn't speak. I'll speak about Item D and that is the matter of a formulation of the bipartisan waste watch committee.

There have already been three speakers and all three of those speakers gave very glowing reasons of why this council needs a waste watch committee, very good reasons.

Councillor SCHRINNER talking about things that are happening way in the past, Councillor QUIRK, other things that are wasteful, things that this council has been spending money on in more recent times.

They are very good reasons why we need a bipartisan waste watch committee. But they're trying to say that no, there's something political about it and what really, really disappoints me is that they've got a view that there is no room for improvement. They've got a view that there is no room for improvement.

Well then Madam Chair if there is no room for improvement, what is wrong with a councillor from each side of bipartisan committee looking at the matters that are coming through the bureaucracy, through this council to make sure there is as least amount of waste as possible in the area of catering, in the area of travel, in the area of consultancies.

It's very important that we look after the interests of our ratepayers. The money we collect in rates is not our money; its ratepayers' money and it is very important that we make sure we get the best value possible out of every dollar of it.

Madam Acting Chair, what I want to do is talk about how the refusal of the LORD MAYOR to set up an independent waste watch committee is actually going to affect ratepayers.

The reason this has come to light is that a couple of weeks ago in one week of cheques (presented to Finance Committee) there was \$93,000 bill for catering in one week and that matter was exposed by the Courier Mail.

At the very next finance committee meeting Councillor OWEN-TAYLOR raised the issue and went on about it and it is reported in the report today. So \$93,000 in one week - to an average ratepayer they probably would say that is outrageous.

What happens generally? In an average week of the cheques going through council there is about \$10,000 to \$15,000 being spent on catering. Of that \$10,000 to \$15,000 a week, an average of about \$4,000 a week is being spent on civic events.

So Madam Chair, only one third of the money that is being spent on catering by this council is being spent on civic events. Neither Councillor CAMPBELL nor I have been saying oh no, we've got to stop spending money on civic events. It is very important that this council does that.

But rather than look at this issue objectively what's happened is the Liberals are just saying – 'they' just want to focus on civic events. They're saying that Labor is saying that we should be stopping spending money on civic events. That hasn't been the case at all. We haven't said that.

Two thirds of the money that is being spent on catering is not being spent on civic events and I think that's a very good early place for an independent bipartisan waste watch committee to look at the expenditure that is going on in council.

So two thirds of the money being spent on catering is being spent on – have a look Councillor KNAPP, if you look in the cheques each week you'll see that that's about the average. One third of the money is spent on civic events, about two thirds spent on bureaucrats and other sorts of catering events.

There are areas in any large bureaucracy where there should be an independent view of what is being spent, and as I said before about marketing and travel and also consultancies. If anyone who is on the finance committee looked at the cheques each week, they'll see an enormous amount of money being spent on consultancies.

These are areas that I think should be looked at. There are lots of very small things. Even if the independent bipartisan waste watch committee only saved a couple of thousand dollars a year, surely its worthwhile doing. What is wrong with that?

Save a couple of thousand dollars for the ratepayers. Madam Chair, I'm certainly prepared to work for free. I assume that there would be someone, a Liberal councillor in the finance committee who would be prepared to work on that committee for free. I'm offering to do that.

Councillors interjecting

Chairperson: Order please councillors.

Councillor FLESSER: I'm very disappointed that the LORD MAYOR has got a view that there is no room for improvement. I'm very disappointed about that and when you look at some of the cheques, we can all look at them and say oh you know some of these things – does it really need to be spent?

You've only got to look at the cheques this week - one of them is limousine hire for the LORD MAYOR at a cost of \$300 to get the LORD MAYOR from the airport in Canberra to his meeting and back home again.

Now the LORD MAYOR is a very important person and nobody would object to the LORD MAYOR having a personal limousine to drive around in Brisbane, no problem at all. He's a very important person.

He's not as important in Canberra and I think that someone would say well look, surely there is a way of getting the LORD MAYOR around in Canberra to get from the airport to a meeting and back again at a cost of less than \$300.

So Madam Chair, an independent bipartisan waste watch committee could look at that issue, lots of other issues and I'm sure that they'd be able to save at least a couple of thousand dollars a year.

So I'm very disappointed that the LORD MAYOR and the Liberal councillors don't believe that there is extra money to be saved in the areas of catering, in consultancies and travel.

I hope that at some stage in the very near future they'll reconsider their view especially if what's been happening is – well we see the cheques going through finance committee and remember these are cheques that have already been paid.

If we see continuing areas of waste well I think what we'll find is the LORD MAYOR will regret his decision today to reject the independent bipartisan waste watch committee the Labor councillors are offering.

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