

**Urban Taskforce Breakfast**  
**20 October 2009**  
**The Great Debate**

Well good morning. I hope that win on the head toss is an indication of what's going to happen at the next election which is not that far away, but you never know.

Look thanks to each of you for getting up early and coming this morning to take part in this debate. Thanks to the Urban Taskforce particularly for facilitating the debate, thanks to Urbis for sponsoring it. And I'd like to formally acknowledge my parliamentary colleague the Minister for Planning, Kristina Keneally, and also thank Quentin. Quentin Dempster and Stateline for his involvement.

At this juncture just four years out, sorry just 14 months out from the next election, we certainly should be reflecting on what's necessary to get NSW first again. State Labor wants everybody to believe that after it's been in power for 15 years they are just now delivering the best planning system in Australia.

That proposition of course invites the question as to what State Labor has done for the last 15 years, and indeed the 23 years that they've spent in Government since the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act was passed in 1979. 23 out of 30 years and they've made it extremely challenging to do business in NSW.

We just heard Aaron Gadiel recounting some of the economic factors, of course one that really rings out worryingly is that we've got the lowest housing starts in over 25 years in NSW. At the same time as this Government has ensured we have a planning system that doesn't encourage development, doesn't encourage the evolution of the State, through new developments, new housing opportunities.

We've also managed to see local communities all across the State have been alienated. It's an indictment on State Labor that 15 years into this current term, the best the current Planning Minister can offer is that Labor is delivering, is delivering, the best planning system. Not delivered, is delivering. We've just heard again Aaron's summary of whether or not it's the best planning system.

It's an indictment of State Labor that hundreds of community groups felt it necessary to come together last year to express the view that we have the worst planning system in Australia. It's an indictment of State Labor that across NSW, NSW industry knows that there is little transparency, no certainty, and a convoluted, obstructive planning process that has assured companies that once prided themselves on doing business here are now doing business elsewhere.

South Eastern Queensland, Victoria, even the Middle East are currently more attractive options than working within the NSW planning system. In fact I've just returned from the Middle East and I was fascinated to see that in just a couple of square kilometres in Abu Dhabi, there are more cranes across the skyline than there are probably in the entire State of NSW.

In 1979 we had a planning framework that was good for its time, but time has marched on and Labor has delivered numerous layers to the legislation which make it at very cumbersome and confusing.

Amendments such as Part 3A, which I know some of you are very supportive of, introduced in 2005 have effectively admitted that the framework is so lousy, the Minister needs to have extraordinarily broad powers to call in developments that in other jurisdictions would not be considered truly State Significant. And the suspicion has been raised in the broader community that donations to State Labor are closely allied with Ministerial decision making.

And of course you've got the front page of the Sydney Morning Herald yesterday and of course I just picked one up as I came here today again emphasizing the damage that can be done to business confidence, as well as the broader community, with decisions that indicate there are some fundamental problems in the planning system. It's not a positive for the business environment or local communities, when there are concerns donations may influence outcomes.

Some in the development industry tell the Coalition there is a cultural expectation that has grown up under this current Government, that to be at the forefront, to have the best chance of doing business in NSW one's position is enhanced if you have the right Labor connected lobbyist, or if you've donated enough money to the Labor party.

Now that's a perception that business in NSW cannot afford to have. It's a perception that the NSW community cannot afford to have. Of course the planning legislation should provide a framework for the orderly development of our State again as Aaron referred to a little earlier. As well as, as well as getting the development approval process working well. There's two arms.

It should particularly lay out a process which ensures all of you in the business community are treated equally. That each of you are treated fairly. You should know that it's not prone to influence. You shouldn't have to feel that it's necessary to make donations to get outcomes. Of course until the donation system changes political parties will rely on donations for their survival.

Barry O'Farrell has made it clear that the Coalition would like to cap donations and spending on campaigns, Labor has made it clear that it appears to have no such desire.

So in the real world while donations continue it is even more critical that the planning system not permit any opportunity for particular people to get advantage over any others through donations. It should guarantee an objective, efficient assessment process. The Coalition recognises it is critical that there be a new framework that will provide certainty for business to get on with the orderly evolution, the orderly development of what once was, as Aaron observed, the premier State in this country.

We also recognise that across NSW, local community groups, all of us in our other lives as community people, must feel empowered to have a say on how our local communities will evolve.

So the NSW Liberal/Nationals will in Government in the first term, completely overhaul the planning legislation. There won't be any more delays, there won't be any more put offs as there has been under the current Government. It's interesting - Frank Sartor when he was Minister, denied that an overhaul of the Act was necessary. He now publicly says, even before Parliamentary inquiries, that we do need an overhaul of the Act. The Minister still says we don't. That is the current Minister still says we don't.

A new planning framework delivered by the Liberal/Nationals will ensure industry has certainty in

doing business in NSW. Putting it again back, to have the opportunity to be first in Australia.

Whilst Part 3A will go and I know that's concerning to some of you, there will be open, transparent provision for truly State Significant development to be dealt with. In addition we will establish Infrastructure NSW. A high level body tasked with ensuring expert advice to Government on infrastructure needed to support transparent delivery of well designed, sustainable development.

One of it's briefs will be to ensure smooth pathways to achieving planning outcomes. 15 years of a Labor Government's failure to deliver a sound planning framework has ensured that such a framework is now very much the focus.

The business community and the broader community expect nothing less, the Coalition in Government will deliver that framework and that certainty that ensures NSW is again, is again the first place to do business in Australia. Thank you very much.