

Legislative Council 13 March 2020

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK (17:21:57): I move:

That, under Standing Order 52, there be laid upon the table of the House within 28 days of the date of passing of this resolution the following documents, created since 12 April 2018, in the possession, custody or control of the Minister for the Public Service and Employee Relations, Aboriginal Affairs, and the Arts, the Premier, the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Create NSW, the Trustees of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences Staff Agency, Infrastructure NSW or the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment:

- (a) any 2019 revised business case or cost benefit analysis relating to the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences [MAAS] project;
- (b) all documents relating to the MAAS project capital and recurrent costs, exhibition concepts, and commercial and income-generating opportunities;
- (c) all documents relating to any visitor studies, planning costs, and architectural, museological, geotechnical, engineering, heritage and flood risk studies conducted for the MAAS project;
- (d) all documents relating to the Powerhouse Precinct at Parramatta International Design Competition;
- (e) all documents relating to the Ultimo Creative Industries Precinct;
- (f) all documents relating to the transfer and storage of large and very large objects for the MAAS project;
- (g) all documents relating to the proposed heritage listing of the Powerhouse museum; and
- (h) any legal or other advice regarding the scope or validity of this order of the House created as a result of this order of the House.

I am calling on these papers because we are now over five years into this fiasco. There is still no clarity on why moving the Powerhouse Museum is necessary. The plan bears little resemblance to what was proposed originally. Instead, now there are four plans, with the Powerhouse collection to be distributed across a set of interlocking projects. There is a design and development project of the new museum at Parramatta; the collections, logistics, digitisation and relocation project; and the planning for the remnant Ultimo creative industries precinct on the current Powerhouse Museum site, which may or may not include a lyric theatre. How a lyric theatre fits into a museum site is beyond my understanding at this stage. Perhaps the Government can elucidate that a bit further.

The design plan shows the new museum at Parramatta will be half the size of the current one at Ultimo and will not house the outstanding power and transport displays, which will be relegated to a storage facility inaccessible to the general public. That is vandalism in its worst form. The first floor will be 10 metres high with no way that visitors can get into the building. The director told me in budget estimates hearings that we will have to wait for the next stage of the plan before we know where the front door will be, if indeed there will be a front door.

Some research also shows that visitors to Sydney will be less inclined to travel to Parramatta to view the collections. We must know if that is the case. We must see the studies conducted to justify the plans at a cost of nearly \$2 billion. The current Powerhouse Museum is one of the only museums that represents the history and contributions made to the State by regional New South Wales. It holds contributions by the gold and mining industries, timber and wool, wheat and water, and transport and power, and exhibitions on the role of women and migration history. However, there is no mention of those displays in the new mission statements. Rather, the new museum will celebrate Sydney—what a joke.

The \$2 billion being spent on the vanity project could go a long way towards managing and funding irreplaceable heritage collections located all over regional and rural New South Wales. The money would go even further if it were spent on bushfire recovery or drought assistance. Why does this Government want to destroy our history for a few hectares on the harbour? The \$2 billion Liberal-Nationals vanity project might seem like pocket change for the Government, but that money could be far better spent supporting regional and rural museums throughout the State. The project demands accountability and transparency from this Government, but we are getting none. So now we call on our standing orders and the power of this House to provide us with what the Government will not provide us.

The Hon. WALT SECORD (17:24:59): As the Shadow Treasurer and shadow arts Minister, I speak on behalf of the Labor Party on private member's business item No. 388 dealing with the Powerhouse Museum call for papers. It will come as no surprise that Labor will supporting the motion.

First, I congratulate the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party MLC the Hon. Robert Borsak on his persistent work in the area of holding the Berejiklian Government to account.

The Hon. Robert Borsak: Dogged work; like a pig dog.

The Hon. WALT SECORD: Okay, I congratulate the Hon. Robert Borsak on his the dogged work of holding the Berejiklian Government to account on this fiasco. I never thought that I would stand in this Chamber and say that Deputy Premier John Barilaro was right: This is a dog of a project. It should be scrapped and it should be redirected. I never ever thought that I would agree with John Barilaro. The documents and the business case for the Powerhouse Museum are needed to inform the community. As the honourable member said, there is a cloak of secrecy surrounding the project. It has been kicking around now for five years.

A shovel has not cracked the soil there. The only people to have been paid or the only jobs that have been created are the consultants and consultancy jobs. I think \$36 million or \$38 million have been spent on consultants on the project. It was going to be a central museum and a cultural institution for Sydney's west, but a look at the design reveals that it is going to be a farmers market. The Hon. Don Harwin, the former arts Minister, had a dream of a lyric theatre. There was going to be a significant reduction in exhibition space. Then there are the issues of where the locomotive is going, and where all the artefacts and materials in the museum would be held.

What would happen at Castle Hill? Again, not a single construction job has been created in the fiasco. We need the business case. The issue has been raging for five years. The conservative cost of the project is \$1.5 billion; we had evidence that it could cost up to \$2 billion. That is almost three country hospitals. That is extravagant. Not only should we get the papers but the Government, the Premier and the Treasurer should scrap the project in these tough economic circumstances and direct the money into a project that is needed, such as one in rural and regional New South Wales or, for heaven's sake, a hospital in Sydney's south-west specialising in maternity services, or the Singleton bypass, or improvements to the rail links between Sydney, Goulburn, Queanbeyan and Canberra. There are many other projects. [*Time expired.*]

The Hon. MARK LATHAM (17:28:12): One Nation supports the motion moved by our friends and colleagues in the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party. From a western Sydney perspective, I have always had heavy reservations about the Powerhouse Museum. It seems to me to reek of cargo cultism that the North Shore Liberal Government looks at all the savages in western Sydney and says, "You need to get some culture into you to lift up. You are a bunch of Les Pattersons out there. We are going to pick up this museum out of Ultimo and dump it in Parramatta for you." That is not a proper interpretation of western Sydney and it does not match up with western Sydney's actual needs. In terms of transport access, the Ultimo site, not Parramatta, is more accessible from south-west Sydney—the vast suburbs running from Holsworthy through to Camden. Parramatta is a very inaccessible place. I know it is often described as the centre of Sydney, but not in terms of the public transport network. To get there from Campbelltown, I think three trains must be changed.

It is not necessarily even a central western Sydney location. It is not accessible and the origins of the scheme represent a fundamental misunderstanding of the needs of western Sydney. We should move beyond the notion of fake cargo cultism and address the real needs in the region. I cannot believe the Government says it has enough money to take a perfectly good museum at Ultimo and transfer it to Parramatta but not enough money to build a new public hospital for the 1.3 million people who will live west of the M7 in western Sydney—that vast area around the aerotropolis. People who live there have the longest drive to get their kids to a public hospital—be it Penrith, Liverpool or Campbelltown—of anyone living in the Sydney metropolitan area.

Beyond that, here is a statistic for members, who have probably read about the level of population growth in south-west Sydney: No State Government, be it Labor or Liberal, has built a new community health centre in south-west Sydney this century. The last one was Rosemeadow in Campbelltown in 1999. It is the most outstanding example of public sector neglect of a growing young population. There has been no new community health centre in south-west Sydney this century from Labor—just as bad—or Liberal. There are far bigger—

The Hon. Walt Secord: I want to fix it, Mark!

The Hon. MARK LATHAM: You want to fix it? Thankfully for the shadow Minister, who is bellowing about it, his colleague the Hon. Greg Donnelly is on the job with his Portfolio Committee No. 2 inquiry into the health needs of south-west Sydney. Scrap the Powerhouse; save the money and put it into things we want in western and south-western Sydney. As a citizen, a representative and, most importantly, a parent, I would rather have top-quality, accessible public health facilities than a museum

at Parramatta that, quite frankly, is not accessible. It is easier to get to Ultimo. This is all wrong. The arts Minister has gone and this project should go with him.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN (17:31:13): The Greens support this call for papers because, first, the relocation of the Powerhouse Museum is an expensive and unnecessary undertaking with little proven community demand or benefit; and, secondly, and perhaps more importantly, this pandemic has made necessary the need for transparency and accountability around how every single dollar in the Arts budget is spent because our arts sector in this State is on its knees. The estimated \$1½ billion, perhaps \$2 billion, price tag—the Hon. Robert Borsak mentioned it today—for moving the Powerhouse Museum from Ultimo to Parramatta may have been pretty shocking last year. This year, during a pandemic with our arts sector on its knees, it is incomprehensible. The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown many cultural institutions into existential crisis, with one-of-a-kind venues, such as Carriageworks, filing for voluntary administration. Arts workers are lucky if they are able to qualify for JobKeeper and JobSeeker, given the sporadic and short-term nature of much of their work. They unfortunately face an extremely perilous future.

Exhibitions, performances and installations have all been put on hold and the arts community is asked to lean on resilience while hoping for a return to pre-pandemic cultural vibrancy. Why then, in the context of such significant challenges, would the Government proceed with the closure and pointless, wasteful relocation of an internationally renowned, culturally significant and architecturally historic museum? The 2019 report from the Inquiry into Museums and Galleries in New South Wales recommended an injection of funding to reinvigorate the existing Powerhouse site and building a new, separate institution specific to western Sydney's unique history— two measures that could have meaningful community outcomes. At this time more than any other we should not be extracting from our limited reserves of cultural capital, but adding to them.

This call for papers is the minimum expectation we should have of the Government to explain the Powerhouse relocation plans. Cost-effective alternatives with the expansion of the western Sydney arts and cultural sector should be explored with the same energy the Government uses to defend its position, situated within the new normal of COVID-19 sector specific challenges. Moreover, recent flooding of the new Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences site in Parramatta and the potential risk to the heritage status of the Willow Grove building also require due attention at this time. I note the Government's unwillingness to cooperate previously in the presentation of the final business case to justify to the Parliament and the public the worth or otherwise of closing and relocating the Powerhouse Museum, and that is why this call for papers is so necessary and supported.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES (17:34:07): The Government will not oppose the motion.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE (17:34:13): I speak in support of this motion and I am glad that the Government will not be opposing it. Maybe this is the first step towards the Government reversing this terrible policy mistake, which is about blowing up the Powerhouse and then spending in the order of \$1½ billion—or, as the Hon. Robert Borsak quite correctly notes, potentially up to \$2 billion—to destroy a cultural icon and produce a highly contested facility in Parramatta. The people of Parramatta have said they love their heritage. They want to save Willow Grove and if they get a world-class cultural institution—which they deserve—it should be a world-class cultural institution not transported from Ultimo but embedded in and growing from the heritage, the culture and the extraordinary history, both First Nations and post, of Parramatta. That is what the institution in Parramatta should show.

At a time like this the Government thinks it has a loose \$2 billion of public money to spend on a vanity project, destroy something that generations have built up and loved, and produce a facility in Parramatta that does not even have the support of the community in Parramatta. If ever there was a time to seize an opportunity from a crisis surely the Government can choose this moment to backtrack on a disastrous policy and use this crisis we are seeing in finances, public health, society and the pandemic to work its way back and reverse this disastrous—

The Hon. Trevor Khan: Point of order: As the member knows, the motion before the House is a Standing Order 52 call for papers. Mr David Shoebridge is making a discursive speech that I think he has plucked from a previous speech on a former report into the very same subject. I ask that the member be brought back to the remit of the motion.

The PRESIDENT: I ask Mr David Shoebridge to indicate why this order for the production of documents should be supported, not whether he agrees or disagrees with what is being proposed.

Mr DAVID SHOEBRIDGE: I appreciate the direction. If ever there was a time to get the documents and actually see what on earth type of crazy economic plan the Government has that would

justify this project, then it is now. Let us see it. Let us not see a privilege claim; let us see it all out there in the open—everything that went to Cabinet and that did not go to Cabinet. Let us see the details.

The Hon. ROBERT BORSAK (17:37:24): In reply: The arts sector is on its knees, we know that. In reality, this is a fake arts project. That is what it has turned into. The Government will destroy the collection and it will also destroy a historic buildings precinct in Parramatta if the plan goes ahead. The building design is inappropriate and not fit for purpose. I wonder whether Mr Perrottet will fund this project now, post-COVID 19? That is the \$64 million question—who knows? I certainly hope he does not because I think this project deserves to be killed. I call on the Government and the Treasurer to kill it because it is a damn waste of money. I commend the motion to the House.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that the motion be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.