

Time to put major projects on the budget agenda (Editorial: The Courier 11th May 2009)

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TIMES of crisis call for decisive action, big thinking and a clear focus on the long-term.

Leading Ballarat organisations have endorsed a push for the Federal Government to put nation building on top of its budget agenda.

The Committee for Ballarat, the University of Ballarat, the Australian Industry Group, Ballarat Trades Hall and the Ballarat Renewable Energy and Zero Emissions group all mirror the collective consciousness, with calls for deep and significant infrastructure investment.

Road, rail and port transport, green initiatives, science and technology, and education should all be budget priorities.

We need the government to invest in major projects to provide employment, business-growth and long-term returns _ and this view is shared by an increasing number of Australians.

Business groups in this city and further afield say tax cuts will have only a narrow impact and limited coverage.

And recent polls show many Australians are not in favour of more handouts.

While a recovery fuelled by retail spending may appeal to some, collectively we recognise the country is economically on a war-footing.

The government response needs to be profound and far-reaching, and beyond political imperatives.

Treasurer Wayne Swan has hinted at the biggest fiscal deficit on record.

He says Australia, like the rest of the world, has been the victim of a "financial wrecking ball".

A rapidly deteriorating world economy will force down forecasts while unemployment predictions look set to be even more serious.

This is, undoubtedly, one of the most critical federal budgets in the country's history.

High infrastructure spending must be paired with creditable and sustainable economic management.

Despite the international volatility, Mr Swan must outline a convincing and clear roadmap to recovery.

Safety nets for the society's disadvantaged and poor must be maintained, even strengthened.

All this is a daunting challenge.

On the other side of the world, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has received widespread condemnation for a recent budget that was focused heavily on tax measures.

He was seen as fiddling at the edges, perhaps while Britain burns, at least financially.

Likewise, here in Australia this budget will be the Rudd Government's moment of truth.