



Speech by

Dr DAVID WATSON

MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard 23 November 1999

DEPARTMENT OF STATE DEVELOPMENT

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (6.11 p.m.): I rise to second the motion moved by the member for Burnett. It speaks volumes about this Government that the Minister for State Development and Trade is best known for vandalising Queensland's international can-do reputation. The Deputy Premier might be good at kicking heads, which seems to be his main claim to fame, but in Government he is better known for kicking his own goals. In any other team, he would have been dropped from the side for dropping the ball over Technomart. The collapse of that venture was an international embarrassment of the first order.

The Minister for State Development and Trade has effectively sabotaged the bipartisan effort to promote Queensland as the Smart State. He and his super salesman boss, the Premier, who is sitting next to him, sent a message to the world that their word, their promises and their invitations are not worth a cracker. Worse still, they made Queensland an international laughing stock. The Government should stop reading its own propaganda and start checking the web sites around the place.

The Minister wants us to believe that this is ancient history and that we are simply raking over the ashes, but he still will not tell us—and he had a chance today during question time—the direct cost to Queensland taxpayers. Is it \$300,000? Is it \$600,000? Is it more? The Minister will not say. He will not even deny that the initial sponsorship of \$200,000 was paid before the agreement was signed. The Minister will not even tell us if a claim has been made against the \$300,000 bail-out package which he negotiated before the conference turned belly-up. He would not answer any of the questions that I asked him during question time today.

Anyone would think it was his money. It is not! The money belongs to the taxpayers of Queensland and they are entitled to an answer.

Mr Elder: What about the \$1.5m that you gave to Starland?

Dr WATSON: We will talk about that at some other time. What is the Minister trying to hide? During question time today the Minister could have stood in his place and answered the question.

Mr Elder: I should resign, shouldn't I?

Dr WATSON: The Minister should not talk about that; he might get a surprise. Technomart was only the most obvious symptom of this Minister's gross incompetence. The Deputy Premier is supposed to be the Minister for grunt, but there has been precious little evidence of that during office hours.

We are still waiting for something more than hot air to back up the Minister's big talk about the gas pipeline from Papua New Guinea to Gladstone. We are still waiting for something more than hot air to back up his big talk about a new alumina refinery at Gladstone.

Mr Elder interjected.

Dr WATSON: The Minister is the one who has been pushing the pipeline from Papua New Guinea to Gladstone, but it is just hot air. The Government has not delivered on any of those projects. The Government talks about these matters, but there is no delivery. We are still waiting for the Minister's department to make a dent in unemployment.

It is a telling measure of the Deputy Premier's effectiveness that Queensland is actually going backwards under his stewardship as the Minister for grunt. Economic growth is down, mining exploration

is down, commercial property approvals are down, domestic property approvals are down and business investment is slowing down. What is up? Government charges are up, business overheads are up and unemployment is up.

Mr Elder interjected.

Dr WATSON: I asked the Minister to do that the other day, but he would not take responsibility for his actions. The Deputy Premier may claim that he has little or nothing to do with some of those decisions, which, I guess, fall within the ambit of other ministerial portfolios. However, he tends to interfere elsewhere when he wants to. That is not a defence; it is an indictment of his waning influence.

The Minister is head of the AWU faction in Cabinet but he has not scored a hit in 18 months. The loony Left has been calling all the shots ever since it rolled the Minister on greenfield site agreements earlier this year. The Minister for grunt has been neutered.

Look at the issues that this Government is promoting. Is the AWU pushing for boutique brothels? Is the AWU pushing for softer drug laws? The AWU's traditional focus is on the workplace, not bleeding heart policies and social engineering. The Government's agenda has been hijacked by the loony Left. The AWU is out in the cold with the Minister for grunt. If Bill Ludwig was here tonight he would be voting with us. He would probably go one step further and move a motion of no confidence in the Minister.

The Premier told us that the Minister for grunt would lead the charge on unemployment. What a joke! Australia is heading towards 7% unemployment and Queensland is heading towards 9%. That is what is happening under this Minister.

Time expired.
