



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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GOCORP

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.44 a.m.): Over recent days many Queenslanders have been asking the question whether the Beattie Labor Government is incompetent, corrupt or both. After the abysmal performance and the absolute contempt with which the Premier and acting Treasurer treated this Parliament today, I think that we are entitled to ask whether the acting Treasurer is incompetent, corrupt or both. What we are seeing today is a massive exercise in defeat—in defeat of common decency and ethics in Government—through an underhanded attempt by the acting Treasurer to deflect attention away from himself and his Government.

The great scandals of public administration in Queensland have always been under Labor Governments—the Mungana affair, "Red Ted" Theodore, "Fine Cut" Foley and now, more recently, the deliberate and premeditated efforts of the Beattie Labor Government to award Queensland's first Internet gaming licence to companies associated with three Labor mates, one of whom bragged that he stood to make in excess of \$20m from the deal.

It is clear that the Premier and acting Treasurer is not interested in answering the questions that Queenslanders want answered. It is becoming increasingly clear that the only way we can get to the bottom of this whole messy affair is through a full, open public inquiry with the acting Treasurer, the former Treasurer, the Deputy Speaker and the other Labor mates under oath and subject to cross-examination.

This morning the Opposition asked a number of questions. If those questions had been answered openly and honestly, the acting Treasurer could have put this scandal to bed. I wish to speak a little about the massive deceit that is now under way. A question that I asked was why the acting Treasurer—the Premier—for the past two weeks has failed to use his extensive powers under the Interactive Gambling (Player Protection) Act to suspend or cancel the Gocorp licence pending the outcome of the investigations by the Attorney-General and the Criminal Justice Commission. Why is it necessary to bring in special retrospective legislation? It is necessary to bring in special retrospective legislation only if we want to protect Gocorp minus the Labor mates. We all know that no-one knows who else is involved. There are reports and rumours; no-one knows who else is involved.

The fact is that under section 48 of the Interactive Gambling (Player Protection) Act 1998, the Minister may suspend an interactive gambling licence immediately if the Minister believes a ground exists to suspend or cancel the licence, circumstances are extraordinary and so on. Section 44 of that Act details grounds for suspension or cancellation. But also, most importantly, any decisions taken by the acting Treasurer under the Interactive Gambling (Player Protection) Act are not justiciable. Section 59 of the Act states—

"A decision of the Governor in Council or Minister made, or appearing to be made, under this Act about an interactive gambling licence, a person with an interest or potential interest in an interactive gambling licence, the authorisation (or revocation of the authorisation) of an interactive game or the approval (or cancellation of the approval) of an exemption scheme—

(a) is final and conclusive;

- (b) cannot be challenged, appealed against, reviewed, quashed, set aside, or called in question in another way, under the Judicial Review Act 1991 or otherwise (whether by the Supreme Court, another court, a tribunal or another entity); and
- (c) is not subject to any writ or order of the Supreme Court, another court, a tribunal or another entity on any ground."

It already exists under the legislation. Therefore, the question must be asked: why has the Premier, as acting Treasurer for two weeks, having had this weaponry in his arsenal to deal effectively with the Gocorp financial scandal in a manner that does not open the State of Queensland to compensation and attack in the courts and that does not expose the taxpayers of Queensland, refused to exercise those provisions of that legislation? Instead, he is about to bring into this place and seek to rush through the Parliament in one day a Bill that will protect Gocorp minus the three Labor mates who have so far been identified, yet we do not know which other Labor mates or associates may still be involved in the application. That is quite apart from the fact that any Labor mate would be able to park their shareholding and come to an arrangement with a colleague or another shareholder to recoup the financial gains at some later time.

I say that there must now be serious questions about the competence of the Premier, the ethics of the Premier, the honesty of the Premier and the decency of the Premier for not using the powers that he has under the interactive gaming Act to at least suspend the licence until such time as the Criminal Justice Commission and the Auditor-General have visited the issue and made a report. Just as Queenslanders have been asking, "Is this Government corrupt or incompetent?" Queenslanders today, as a result of the Premier's actions in this Parliament, can now ask, "Is the Premier incompetent or corrupt?" He can take his choice.

We have had a litany of untruths from the member for Brisbane Central. First of all, we had the Sergeant Schultz defence: he knew nothing. This morning he was at pains to point out how much everyone knew about the Gocorp application except, of course, himself. He said he knew nothing. Then, of course, there was the famous memo—the ministerial directive to the member for Ipswich to get involved, the memo from the chief of staff in the Premier's office to the chief of staff in the Treasurer's office. It stated—

"The Premier has requested that you urgently have an appropriate staff member discuss Internet gambling with Bill D'Arcy, MLA."

We have in this State now a Premier with some similarities to President Yeltsin—"Boris" Beattie. He sacks everyone but himself. It is always someone else's fault. We have seen him leapfrogging; we have seen him backflipping. He said there was no need for the Treasurer to stand aside. Then, of course, the Treasurer stood aside. He said he could not influence the Deputy Speaker into standing aside. The Deputy Speaker stands aside. He said he could not stop the Deputy Speaker going to Trinidad and Tobago. Then the Deputy Speaker decides not to go to Trinidad and Tobago. He said the other day that it would be illegal for the Parliament to pass legislation to stop Labor Holdings buying shares in the privatised TAB—he could not do it—and then he announced that he was going to do it, "It is in the legislation."

Queenslanders can rightfully ask the question: how can we believe anything this man says any more? This morning when he could have put this issue to bed, when he could have said, "No, I didn't meet anyone associated with Gocorp; no, there was a very good reason why I didn't exercise my Executive authority under the interactive gaming legislation; no, I wasn't aware of such discussions; no, I'm not aware of any instructions being given to the Under Treasurer, the Deputy Under Treasurer, the Director of the Office of Gaming Regulation", he fudged every question. He refused to answer question after question after question, and that raises questions about the Premier himself.

Time expired.
