



Speech by

Hon. R. SCHWARTEN

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard 2 March 1999

ADDRESS IN REPLY

Hon. R. E. SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton— ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing) (3.09 p.m.): The debate on the motion for the adoption of the Address in Reply is a wonderful opportunity for members to speak about their electorates and to place on record their thanks to those electors who gave them the privilege of being in this august place. The reality is that 59% of the people of Rockhampton supported my candidacy in the last election. The National Party had the most disgraceful result that it has ever had. One Nation received 26% of the vote, most of which was absorbed from the National Party. That just goes to show that a lot of the people who normally support the conservative side of politics were absolutely revolted at the thought of their party placing One Nation ahead of the Labor Party. On the day at the polling booths I saw people—especially some whom I know to be Liberal voters—take Labor Party how-to-vote cards. I have never seen that before. It may never happen again, unless we see a repeat performance of the very pathetic tactic that was used at that time to try to bolster the failing Borbidge/Sheldon coalition.

The people who supported One Nation at the last election—and many of them I know personally—who looked to One Nation for some level of honesty and integrity in the process that was being promised are very, very disappointed in what they see. They have seen—exactly as we predicted—a ramshackle group of people who do not take accountability seriously.

Mr Lucas: Hobbledehoy!

Mr SCHWARTEN: Hobbledehoy! They do not tend to understand that this place is a place of accountability. What have been the two big issues that have absorbed the attention of One Nation in recent times? One was the former member for Mulgrave who, even though he had left the place, tried to rort the system even when he was out of it by trying to collect his salary in advance. The other issue, of course, has been the actions of the member for Ipswich West who, by his continued attacks upon it, has persisted in dragging the Police Service in this State into a total state of disgrace. Now, of course, he wants to get rid of the CJC. The people in Rockhampton who supported One Nation are saying to me that they were voting for One Nation to make a difference—to sharpen up politicians, to get the accountability lines in there and to ensure that the rorts come to an end.

We now find one of the former members of One Nation who was elected on that platform has his snout in the trough further than any politician has ever even tried to in the history of this State. He is wanting to be paid for something that he did not do and for a job he did very poorly. At the same time, he also wanted to bring disrepute upon his own party and highlight its inadequacies. Of course, the former police officer, Mr Paff, chose to bring this place into disrepute by wanting to get rid of the CJC, the very group of people set up to stop the rorts, and to keep the eyes of the public firmly on politicians. So, the people in One Nation have done very, very well! Of course, now they have split—

Mr Black: What about the \$600,000 ministerial office?

Mr SCHWARTEN: I will get to that.

The split in the party shows One Nation members as being the disgraceful people that they really are. They have let down badly the 26% of people in Rockhampton who supported them. They will not be getting anything like that the next time they run.

Mr Black: We will see. We will see.

Mr SCHWARTEN: We will see. I am willing to bet that at any time. I am quite prepared to have the bet. I will put my money up—no problem at all.

I will address something that appears to have caught the enthusiasm of One Nation, that is, the refit of 1,000 square metres of floor space. This issue clearly shows to me their lack of understanding of anything in this State. I defy any one of them to obtain a quote to have a high-rise building office for 40 people fitted out at anything less than \$500 per square metre. The going rate is between \$500 and \$600. I guess One Nation members would have to take their shoes and socks off to work out 1,000 times that figure. The reality is that 1,000 square metres of fit-out on a high-rise building costs between \$500 and \$600 per square metre. The floor in question cost \$595,000. If the member can get it done cheaper than that, he can go right ahead and do it.

Mr Black interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: It is very pathetic, really.

I turn now to a number of very positive issues that this Government has brought forward in my electorate. We have had enough of the negatives that we always hear from One Nation, the conspiracy theories and so on, which people really are tired of. People want to know where their kids are going to get a job, what sort of hope there is in Rockhampton for continuing job growth and what sort of hope there is for getting some form of economic development that guarantees the future of the place. As I have said on a number of occasions, Rockhampton faces a very bright future. As I travel around the State, I observe that there are many areas that are doing very well, but they have just about reached the zenith in terms of their development.

We have a couple of really good projects that will start in the very near future. One is at the Prestons nickel mine. That will kick in some time in April next year. That will employ about 1,000 people in the construction phase and about 300 thereafter. Similarly, ANC is building a pilot plant at Stanwell in the industrial park next to the Stanwell Power Station. That has the potential to be a real winner, because we had the magnesite plant there and this smelter will value add onto that. Value adding is something that we need very badly in this country. As a result of that value adding, permanent jobs will be created. I notice that the Premier has just talked to people from Fiat. That company is very interested in coming to central Queensland to set up a components factory, a casting works. Those are two projects that are on the go at the moment. Currently, \$8m is being spent on the airport upgrade. We have planned a number of other projects.

There are a number of other issues that I promised at the last election that I would deliver on. I am proud to stand in this place and say that I have delivered on each and every one of those. The first of those was the Smart City concept, which is moving the University of Central Queensland back into the CBD. I notice the Leader of the Liberal Party nodding in agreement. He, being an academic—and I do not mean that with any disrespect—would understand the significance of that move, especially when we have a CBD that is, like most CBDs, in trouble. We handed over to that Smart City concept a number of buildings—the former Supreme Court building, the District Court and the Magistrates Court and another building on Quay Street that used to be occupied by the TAFE college. In all, we handed over about \$11m worth of buildings, plus \$2m in cash to refurbish them. I made that promise before the election. That is something that I was proud, as both the local member and the Minister, to hand over. That is a very appropriate long term use of those buildings.

I have to say that we in CQU now have our own sandstone, and they tell me that it is older than the University of Queensland. Rockhampton Corporation, or Rockhampton Enterprise as it has now become known, was another idea that I had. One of the problems that we in Rockhampton have—and I think that this is fairly true of a lot of places about the size of Rocky—is that we have a lot of groups trying to bring enterprises into the city to generally get the place going and to create employment prospects for our young people. I thought that it was time to try to bring all of those groups together. That is why we promised, and have now delivered thanks to Jim Elder, \$250,000 to kick-start Rockhampton Enterprise, whose job it will be to go out and, firstly, unite all the development agencies in Rockhampton; secondly, to go out to the highways and the byways, as it were, to bring business into the city; and, thirdly, of course, to export the businesses that we have—find markets for the excellent range of goods and services that are produced in Rockhampton. I think that it is a very exciting project to get involved with in Rockhampton.

The river bank redevelopment is not going as well as the Mayor of Rockhampton would like it to be. However, we have offered half a million dollars towards the labour costs of redeveloping the river bank. I always say that it is the most underutilised spot in Rockhampton. It has huge potential. Rockhampton is probably one of the few places in the world that one would ever go to where one cannot get down to the actual riverside. Over the years, I think that really has been to our detriment. When that redevelopment finally gets under way—there have been a few problems associated with it—this Government will be weighing in with half a million dollars as part of its Jobsplan to hire long-term unemployed people to be part of that project and to help attack our joblessness and our lack of skill base for long-term unemployed people.

Over the past few years, a number of schools in Rockhampton have become dilapidated. For example, when I became the Minister, I was appalled to find out that the Frenchville State School needed \$50,000 spent on it to make its electrical fit-out safe. It was completely overloaded and the power was going off on a regular basis. One of the first tasks that I did was to find \$50,000 to fix that problem before a child was electrocuted. Similarly, we have had a problem at The Hall State School where a unit for disabled children was, quite frankly, a disgrace. We have been able to move in a relocatable classroom and have spent about \$100,000 in doing up that area. It is now quite a hospitable area and one that the teachers, the students, and, of course, their parents are very satisfied with. Similarly, there have been improvements made to the Park Avenue State School and at Rockhampton State High School, which of course is my old school.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Yes, it is a fine school and it has a fine principal, Mr David Curran. It is a particularly well-run school and, as I say, I am proud to say that it was my alma mater, and what a great job it did.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Absolutely. As honourable members know, I commenced my working life in the building industry. I believe that apprenticeships are the lifeblood of our future. In recent times, I think that it has been less trendy to get apprenticeships and we really need to look at that in schools.

Dr Watson: That's why the tradesmen are being paid so much now.

Mr SCHWARTEN: The point that the member makes is a reasonable one because, over the years, as soon as there is a drop in the economy, people stop training. Of course, in 1983 this happened federally. We started to come out of a recession only to find that we had a skill shortage in this country. As a result, we imported tradespeople. We are doing that now in Queensland: we are importing, especially metal tradespeople in the boilermaking area, to fill a void that has been created.

This Government has made a commitment to training people and to apprenticeships particularly. I am delighted to say that this week in Rockhampton nine young people will get a start in Q-Build. They will be part of the 140 apprentices who will start this year. As I said, nine of those will be starting in Rockhampton. I think that it is a very valuable thing for a Government to continue to use its day labour forces as a method of bolstering the industry by providing highly qualified, well-trained apprentices and, as a result of their training, tradespeople in the market. Those who criticise Q-Build do not seem to understand that they go out into the market. At the moment, there are about 500 apprentices in Q-Build. The day that Q-Build is not in the market is the day that the building industry will have to try to find its tradespeople elsewhere and its trained people elsewhere.

The HITT scheme in housing, which was an initiative of Tom Burns, a former Housing Minister, is a value-for-money operation if ever there was one. It uses public housing construction as a method of training apprentices whereby a number of houses are set aside for that purpose. Under the previous Government, they had to bid for those houses. I do not think that that was an appropriate way to go. If we expect group apprenticeship schemes to train people, then we have to set them aside a certain number of houses. We have done that. The biggest complaint that I had from my local Capricornia Training Company was that it never had any certainty of the number of houses that it was going to get. Therefore, it could not put on apprentices. As a result, I have been able to do a deal whereby for the next four years they will know exactly how many houses they are going to get so that they can train people accordingly and put on a number of apprentices. The Capricornia Training Company, as an example, will be putting on 50 apprentices as a result of this Government making available a certain and specified number of houses over that period.

Ms Boyle: A very real and practical contribution, might I say, Minister.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I thank the member very much. It is such a sensible decision that one wonders why it has not been done before. Anyway, it is being done and it is going to be in operation. It has started and, as a result, the construction industry of Queensland will get some very well-qualified tradespeople.

The biggest problem that Rockhampton faces—and it is no different from anywhere else—is that it has a high youth unemployment level of around 26%. That is just not to be tolerated. We have to do something about it. I believe that the strategies that this Government has in place will address that problem. We have in Rockhampton the wherewithal at our fingertips to turn around that problem. My view is that, in that regard, at the end of the day I will be judged on my performance. I am quite happy to put my credentials against those of any other candidate or any other member in the area in terms of getting projects for the city. As I promised the people of Rockhampton at the last election, I intend to work tirelessly and full on for their benefit.
