



Speech by

Hon. ANNA BLIGH

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

Hansard 11 April 2000

PETFORD TRAINING FARM

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services) (6.15 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

"Delete all words after 'House' and insert the following—

'notes—

- that the Howard Government withdrew annual funding valued in 1997/98 at \$116,000 to the Petford Training Farm in January 1999 and has not revisited this decision;
- that over its 14 years of operation, the Department of Family Services in conjunction with other funding agencies made a number of attempts, including increases in funds and appointment of extra staff to assist the Petford Training Farm to address serious issues of financial and operational mismanagement;
- that on a number of occasions during these 14 years, referrals by the Department were suspended due to standard of care concerns including under former Minister Lingard and Minister Wilson.
- that thirty-five complaints have been made by parents, children and former employees to the Department and Queensland Police Service regarding assault and neglect of children while resident at the facility.'
- that an independent review into the Petford Training Farm recommended that funding be transferred to individual indigenous communities.,
- that the first recommendation of the Forde Commission of Inquiry endorsed the cessation of funds to the Petford Training Farm.,
- that the Government is currently negotiating with Mr Guest to secure a long term solution that respects the rights of all parties;

and supports the decision to reallocate funding from the Petford Training Farm to local indigenous communities for the provision of services to young people at risk in Far North Queensland communities.' "

What a sad, pathetic and utterly moribund creature is the Queensland Liberal Party. If we ever doubted it, tonight we see that it stands for nothing and it believes in nothing. The motion before the Parliament speaks for itself. What arguments are advanced in favour of this extraordinary proposition? Not one! It is nothing more than a grubby and squalid attempt to play cheap politics. The re-ignition of this debate by the member for Indooroopilly does nothing to protect the interests of children and the reputations of those associated with the Petford Training Farm.

I put on record again, as I did in my original ministerial statement, that Mr Geoff Guest has not been the person who is accused in any of the allegations made against this farm, nor is the department the complainant. The complaints, as I said, have been made by parents, children and staff. I commend the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy for the efforts she and her department are making in relation to securing a secure tenure for Mr Guest and his wife.

The first part of the amendment puts the performance of the Liberal Party under scrutiny. The facts speak for themselves. The Liberal Howard Government suspended funding to the Petford Training Farm three months before the Queensland Government did. Mr Entsch, despite all of his chest beating over nearly two years, has failed to convince Senator Herron to restore one single dollar. Mr Beanland has been chasing Mr Entsch around saying that the Queensland Government should reinstate what the Howard Government refuses to do.

I am not surprised that neither Mr Entsch nor Mr Beanland can convince Senator Herron of their proposition. For all my disputes with the man, Senator Herron is someone who I believe probably thinks that 35 complaints of abuse and neglect should be taken seriously. Mr Entsch is on the public record on Cairns radio saying that 40 complaints is not a big deal. I think one complaint is a big deal. How many complaints does it take, Mr Entsch? How many years, how many parents, how many children and how many staff? What would Mr Entsch think is enough? For this Government, 35 is where we draw the line.

The remaining parts of the amendment go to my original concerns. Mr Beanland and his cronies have done nothing to dispute the facts. They have never denied that the complaints were made. They have never denied the financial mismanagement. They have never brought forward any evidence that children are safe in the environment. They have never produced any evidence that public funds are accountable. I can be left to believe only that, if Mr Beanland believes that this is an ideological debate, he does not support these things in public life. So let the record show that, if the member for Indooroopilly, God forbid, ever becomes responsible for this portfolio, that if parents or children complain of abuse or neglect, they will not be believed by him or his Government. If an organisation repeatedly misuses public funds, that will not be something that his Government will take into consideration. If they cannot account for the public money they have been given, Mr Beanland will not take any action.

The care and protection of children is a tough job and it requires tough stuff. It requires the guts to stand up for the vulnerable and the powerless against the vested interests of the powerful. Let the record show that the member for Indooroopilly is without the backbone, without the moral strength of character and without the political fibre to ever take on the task. The member for Indooroopilly can stand assured that I will be making sure that the residents of Indooroopilly are well aware of what he supports.

Time expired.
