



Speech by

**Hon. R. SCHWARTEN**

**MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON**

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Hansard 23 August 2000

**APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C**

**Hon. R. E. SCHWARTEN** (Rockhampton— ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing) (3.42 p.m.): The performance of Opposition members in the Estimates committee hearing showed yet again what little grasp the coalition has of issues confronting the Department of Public Works and Department of Housing. Their performance also highlighted what little effort the shadow Minister has made in the past two years to develop or release any policy for either portfolio. Nitpicking and unfounded scaremongering is no substitute for policy development. It is high time we heard what policy the shadow Minister has in mind.

There is no basis to claims made by the shadow Minister of underspending of \$2.28m on the Roma Street parkland. The forecast for 1999-2000 in last year's Budget papers was \$13.4m. The forecast expenditure in this year's Budget papers was \$11.7m. However, the actual expenditure for 1999-2000 was more than \$13.8m. Instead of underspending \$2.28m, the spending in 1999-2000 was almost \$443,000 above the forecast of \$13.4m. There is no basis to the Opposition's claims of underspending. Similarly, there is no basis to claims of job losses.

Again, the shadow Minister got it wrong in housing by claiming that this Government has cut spending. How does the shadow Minister explain the fact that the Borbidge Government spent \$310m on housing programs in its last year and the latest Budget provides \$440m? Let us talk about underspending. What about the loss of \$130m sacrificed from housing by the Borbidge coalition to fund the \$2 billion Federal surplus? What about the \$90m forgone under the latest CSHA? The only time the coalition has spoken on these issues has been to defend its mates in Canberra. It is about time it stood up for Queensland.

The shadow Minister claimed that only 8% of the Housing budget would be spent on seniors units in the bush. That is either a deliberate untruth or just more evidence of his incompetence. It may come as a surprise to him, but seniors do not just live in seniors units. They also live in other public housing dwellings and in community housing as well, especially in the bush, as the honourable member for Gregory knows. Recently, I announced \$9m for more than 30 community housing projects. Half of the funds for these projects are for seniors in 10 regional centres. On top of that, about \$7m will be spent through the Public Housing Program on commencing 45 seniors units in rural and regional areas and completing more than 120. That is a total of \$11.5m specifically for seniors outside the Brisbane area.

Instead of nitpicking, why does the honourable member not explain where he was when I was trying to secure \$20m from Canberra for more seniors housing in the bush? We all know that the member for Mooloolah leads the cheer squad for Canberra's funding cuts. I know that the member for Gregory does not support that squad, as he is personally aware of the efforts I have put in to provide decent housing in the bush.

The attack on community renewal shows how totally unsuited the shadow Minister is to this portfolio. I answered this at the committee hearing. The bottom line is that the program is community renewal, not Government renewal. That is the difference between the shadow Minister and me. He wants Government wielding the big stick, while I want the community to drive this program, as the member for Logan indicated earlier. It is not designed to impose the Government's will on local communities. The idea is that they tell us what is needed in their area. The shadow Minister's ill-

informed questions on this matter reflect the Liberal Party's property-based notion of housing. To them, public housing has nothing to do with people; it is all about property.

The shadow Minister nitpicked about a \$14,400 five-day legal consultancy for Dale Bracken of Clayton Utz. This was answered fully at the hearings by the head of the Public Works Department legal section, John Scrivens. It is mischievous to disregard the comprehensive answer provided. What a cheek the coalition has to talk about consultancy costs! In fact, the honourable member comes from the side of politics that thinks Government should be run by consultants. In its last year, it spent more than \$8m on consultants through the Department of Public Works. Last year, we spent just \$1.7m, around \$7m less. My office has written to Clayton Utz telling it that the shadow Minister thinks it ripped off taxpayers. He can go to Adelaide Street and explain himself.

The Opposition used the Estimates process to launch yet another attack on Q-Build. The 3,000 employees of Q-Build and their families know the coalition would sack them on day one if it got into Government. The trouble is that the shadow Minister lacks the intestinal fortitude to spell out the Liberal Party policy which aims to throw those workers on the scrap heap. While it would not bother him to sack these workers, the real reason he will not publish his policy is because he is frightened of what rural and regional businesses will say. I say to the shadow Minister: go out and tell the regional centres, where half of Q-Build's staff are based, that you want to withdraw money from their local economy. He should also tell them about the work he wants to take from them by getting rid of Q-Build and explain how it will be replaced. Then there are the apprentices. Perhaps he would like to tell the building industry who will train the 400 Q-Build apprentices.

Time expired.

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