



Speech by

SHAUN NELSON

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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PETFORD TRAINING FARM

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (6.44 p.m.): I have listened to this debate and I can say that some very interesting points have been made. Next week I will be probably sitting down at a table with Geoff at Petford and reading through this debate. I will say to members now what I will say to him then, which is what I have said to him before, and that is, "Geoff, when you lie down with dogs, you wake up with fleas." It is as simple as that. That is nothing against anyone in this Chamber: the simple fact is that Geoff made a deal with Government departments, Geoff sat down and entered the world of bureaucracy and, unfortunately, that is a shady, tricky, nasty, evil planet. It is beyond the realms of his experience and well and truly beyond the realm of experience of many people in north Queensland.

Unfortunately, Geoff is a north Queenslander, the type of person whom I was brought up to respect and revere and the political intrigues, dealings and machinations of Government departments are well and truly beyond the scope of Geoff's expertise as, I must say, they are beyond the scope of many people's expertise. As I said to him at a meeting that we had very recently, when we get into these issues—and he knows this full well—there is always going to be trouble, there are always going to be problems. This is the situation we are at today.

However, I must say that very recently Geoff had a meeting with the director-general from Minister Spence's department, Marg O'Donnell. That was the first time that I have ever seen a director-general in the field. Actually, that was the first time that I have ever met a director-general. I would like to put on record my personal thanks to her for actually coming up to the area, taking the time to sit down and talk to Mr Guest and taking the time to actually make it out to Petford. At the time, the road to Petford had been destroyed by Cyclone Steve. I actually had to help a Channel 9 crew get out of there.

The point of the matter is that Marg O'Donnell sat down with Geoff Guest and went through the issue with him and also with me. She helped me understand a few points that I did not understand before. Even though Geoff was not happy with the outcome—and I must say that I cannot say that I am very happy with the outcome, either—some points were raised and some points are ongoing. Next week I will be talking to Geoff and going over the whole concept of moving on, compensation and all of that sort of stuff.

However, I think that we have to get to the heart of the matter, which is the point that was raised by the member for Mulgrave, and that is that this diversionary course in north Queensland, which entails taking young people out of the loop and giving them a second opportunity, is needed desperately. With the closure of Petford, there is basically nothing left to take on the young people about whom I speak.

It is all well and good for people such as the member for Archerfield—people who have not mustered brumbies at Emu Creek—to talk about how hard it is to rehabilitate some of these young offenders. Some of these young Aboriginal blokes—and, for that matter, young white blokes—are hard cases. They are young males whom I would not like to meet in a dark alley at night-time, and I am no wimp; let me put it that way. So Mr Guest has taken on a very big job in taking in some of these young people. Of course, there are going to be clashes of personality. When we are dealing with young adult or teenage males, there are always going to be clashes of personalities, there are always going to be problems, there are always going to be issues.

Those 35 accounts are not substantiated. I will stand in this Chamber and personally vouch for Mr Guest.

Ms Bligh: They weren't made against Mr Guest.

Mr NELSON: I can tell the Minister right now that he should not even be impugned with that sort of indignity. Anyone in north Queensland would stand here with me and say the same thing. The Minister has heard members of her own caucus say the same thing tonight. I think that the Minister should take on board the words of the member for Mulgrave and, hopefully soon, the member for Cairns.

The simple fact is that those allegations are going to be made. Every day, they are made against police officers and they are made against teachers. I am not saying that there are not issues, but those allegations are not true. Mr Guest is a good, decent, honourable man. He does not deserve the treatment that he has had at the hands of some people. I am not having a go at the Minister; I am just telling her the way it is.

We need a system of diversionary courses for juvenile offenders in north Queensland. We need one of the same scale as Petford. I believe that the funding to Geoff should be reintroduced, because I believe that he is the type of man who can earn the respect of the people about whom I am talking. As I said, these are hard cases who do not look up to correctional institutions and do not consider jail to be anything bad. These are very hard young men who have had a hard life in a hard part of the world. There is only one way to help those sorts of people, and it is the way that Geoff has followed for quite some time.

I support Geoff. I will be talking to him next week. I will make sure that I give him a copy of this debate to read. However, I think that this is a bigger issue.

Time expired.
